

THE DARK CIRCUS:

An examination of the work
of MERVYN PEAKE,
with reference to selected prose and verse.

by

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ABSTRACT

I have attempted in this dissertation to draw together a number of strands that make up the intricate and often bizarre tapestry of Mervyn Peake's work.

In the Introduction, I raise an issue that seems to be most central to his vision: the relationship of the artist to worlds both real and imaginary, and the way in which these two worlds relate to each other.

In Chapter One, I attempt to examine the multi-faceted nature of Peake's talent. Drawn to all the variety of life, expressing his perception of that variety in many different ways, he tries to come to terms with both the aching beauty and tenderness of the world and its horror and ugliness, often, indeed, revealing beauty in that ugliness. The chapter deals, then, with the poetry, both the joyful and the tormented, with the Nonsense world which informs so much of Peake's vision, and with the need to balance the contrary forces of life which he often reveals so tellingly.

Chapter Two brings us to the heart of his vision in Titus Groan. In this chapter I deal with the nature of fantasy and its relation to other modes of opening out the real so that its richness may be revealed: romance, the marvellous, Gothic. I then examine these in terms of the mythic world that is Gormenghast, paying particular attention to ritual and the ways in which the characters in the novel respond to their world, often through escape into private worlds and secret rituals. Peake's use of the grotesque is examined in relation to whether characters are able to grow through their private rituals.

The mythic world is again important in Gormenghast but here we find a tension between Titus who is at once a part of and apart from his environment, and the Castle which is at once oppressive and nurturing. The ambivalence of attitude that Titus experiences offers a focus for the conflict experienced by the other characters in response to the Castle. Titus is seen to be torn between his role as epic hero of his society and as romantic hero,

true to his own impulses. Consequently, the movement towards an assimilation of outer and inner worlds is of vital importance and throughout one is aware that Peake, too, is trying to achieve this assimilation.

Having vindicated himself as epic hero of the sheltering community, Titus grows out of the mythic stillness of Gormenghast and in Titus Alone, we see him confronted by a dystopic world bound to linear time. It is in this deracinated world that Titus learns the value of the Mother that is Gormenghast. He realises that it has given him a set of values that he may bear inside him, that informs and beautifies the world. The parallel between Titus's experience of myth and Peake's experience of imagination is clear, as both put their worlds to the test - the one by physical separation, the other by courageous self-travesty.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, with love.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

I have used the Penguin editions of the Titus books, and the edition of Boy in Darkness that appears in Peake's Progress (London: Allen Lane, 1978).

The poems referred to in Chapter One can be found in an appendix, to which their bibliographical details are affixed.

Errata: page 246, line 1 - "transmitted" to read "recorded."

page 287, line 11 - "Moorcock, Malcolm" to read "Moorcock, Michael."

INTRODUCTION

The words, "dark circus," used in the title of this dissertation, appear half-way through Titus Alone, as Titus confronts the terrifying Veil in the Under-River:

Around him, tier upon tier (for the centre of the arena was appreciably lower than the margin, and there was about the place almost the feeling of a dark circus) were standing or were seated the failures of the earth. The beggars, the harlots, the cheats, the refugees, the scatterlings, the wasters, the loafers, the bohemians, the black sheep, the chaff, the poets, the riff-raff, the small fry, the misfits, the conversationalists, the human oysters, the vermin, the innocent, the snobs and the men of straw, the pariahs, the outcasts, rag-pickers, the rascals, the rake-hells, the fallen angels, the sad-dogs, the castaways, the prodigals, the defaulters, the dreamers and the scum of the earth. (Titus Alone, p.132)

This description seems an appropriate one for the world created by Mervyn Peake. It is a Nonsense universe,¹ a collection of incongruities and freaks, provoking laughter, but a laughter which is frequently uneasy and which modulates into a sense of pathos and, ultimately, horror as we are made more and more aware of the dark world of fear, ruin and chaos that is so tenuously controlled by human structures. Peake warns us at the end of Titus Groan to expect "tears and . . . strange laughter. Fierce births and deaths beneath umbrageous ceilings. And dreams, and violence, and disenchantment" (TG, p.505).

Nevertheless, as "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality,"² men and women devise strategies for ordering that reality, for transforming it into something that can be controlled, whose pattern can be enjoyed. When Goya translates the horrors of war into a perfectly composed painting, he expresses this need for order, yet there is the tension of knowing that to do this is to turn away from naked confrontation with the horror, to impose a vision of harmony on chaos. The circus is, in many ways, also an image of the attempt to control reality. It does not deny the existence of the dark world, it often thrives on that world, but distances it and makes it bearable.

The circus is a way of structuring incongruities in order to give expression to the complexity of the real world and, as such, has had wide appeal among artists from Dickens to Carson McCullers and Herman Hesse, from Chaplin to Welles, Bergman and Fellini.

A circus is an enclosure, a world of "radical juxtaposition"³ where the sublime and the ridiculous confront each other in a space that exists outside that of "normal" everyday experience (normal, that is, from the perspective of a rationally and scientifically orientated society). When we enter this space, we are presented with a world on which the imagination feeds — romance, heroism and terror (albeit contained in a cage, in itself a metaphor). Just as important are their opposites -- the clown who burlesques the tightrope walker, the dwarf who travesties the trapeze artist. As with the novelists and filmmakers mentioned above, Peake reveals a deep-seated fascination for this latter aspect, which finds its fullest expression in the Freak show.

Leslie Fiedler has demonstrated how the shift in attitude towards the Freak, from revulsion to fearful attraction, has increased in our century. For Victorians, the Freak show "is, like Victorian nonsense, intended to be finally therapeutic, cathartic, no matter what initial terror and insecurity it evokes. 'We are the Freaks,' the human oddities are supposed to reassure us, from their lofty perches. 'Not you. Not you!'"⁴ Even in Victoria's day, though, Dickens could say of Mrs. Quilp that she was "a pretty little, mild-spoken, blue-eyed woman" who had "allied herself in wedlock to the dwarf in one of those strange infatuations of which examples are by no means scarce"⁵

In our century, Carson McCullers, says Fiedler, "finds them revelations of the secret self," and he uses as an example a passage from The Member of the Wedding:

Frankie had wandered around the tent and looked at every booth. She was afraid of all the Freaks, for it seemed to her that they had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: we know you. She was afraid of their long Freak eyes.⁶

The Freaks haunt Frankie to the extent that, much later, she asks Berenice, "Do you think I will grow into a Freak?"⁷ Thus the fascination for the strange, the alienated and the grotesque can become dangerous and undermine the individual's confidence in an integrated identity. An artist like Peake, whose work derives much of its strength from the world of nightmare, runs the risk of finally being overcome by it.

The circus, then, is like the hall of mirrors in Chaplin's The Circus or Welles's The Lady From Shanghai.⁸ Our own image may be reflected back to us in idealized form ("that daring young man on the flying trapeze")⁹ or distorted form, or it may be shattered completely. In the circus we see both what we want to be and what we are afraid we are. It is a world that expresses conscious wish and outlawed desire and, in this sense, is akin to fantasy, that which provides wish fulfilment, and often reveals wishes that have long been hidden. Furthermore, the circus is related to fantasy in that it is also an expression of the will to contain the variety of life. Twelve years before his death, Mervyn Peake wrote to his wife from Ireland, explaining how he wanted to order his imaginative world:

1)To canalize my chaos. To pour it out through the gutters of Gormenghast. To make not only tremendous stories in paint that approximate to the visual images in Gormenghast, but to create arabesques, abstracts, of thrilling colour, worlds on their own, landscapes and roofscapes and skyscrapes peopled with hierophants and lords -- the fantastic and the grotesque, and to use paint as though it were meat and drink.¹⁰

This passage makes it clear that Peake wanted to integrate the verbal and the visual aspects of his talent, and "Gormenghast" becomes a way of structuring a world both beautiful and bizarre. He also articulates the dilemma of every artist who tries to balance himself between two worlds. In the words of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the poet is [c]onstantly risking absurdity":

Constantly risking absurdity
and death
whenever he performs
above the heads
of his audience
the poet like an acrobat
climbs on rime
to a high wire of his own making
and balancing on eyebeams
above a sea of faces
paces his way
to the other side of day
performing entrechats
and sleight-of-foot tricks
and other high theatrics
and all without mistaking
any thing
for what it may not be

For he's the super realist
who must perforce perceive
taut truth
before the taking of each stance or step
in his supposed advance
toward that still higher perch
where Beauty stands and waits
with gravity
to start her death-defying leap

And he
a little charleychaplin man
who may or may not catch
her fair eternal form
spreadeagled in the empty air
of existence.

11

Here, the artist himself is the performer, the one being watched, the one who may achieve sublimity by catching Beauty, or make himself ridiculous by falling. He is the clown whose laughter hides the pathos and anguish of existing in an emptiness to which he must give shape and colour. Ferlinghetti emphasises the need of the artist to sustain the tension between the awareness of the real and the value of the beauty that is wrested from it, in the form of his imaginative re-creation of the world. He is the one who, like Peake in the following poem, lives in a state of "crazy balance":

In crazy balance at the edge of time
 Our spent days turn to cloud behind today --
 And all tomorrow is a prophet's dream --
 This moment only rages endlessly
 And prime
 Is always the long moment of decay 12

Peake's poem conveys a sense of helplessness as he senses that he is suspended on the edge of the precipice of the present moment. The two words "and prime" are given a rhythmic stress and are themselves suspended in the space of the page. The past is as ephemeral as the future. All depends on and is concentrated on this moment, this now of existence, which is also the beginning, the golden time that contains all possibilities. And yet, it is bleak and full of despair, for every now is the beginning of the end, every birth points to death. Between the moment that "rages endlessly" and "the long moment of decay" the poet has to find some way of integrating past, present and future that will make sense of and fulfil the promise of "prime." Of course, the very expression of the dilemma in a poem suggests how one may relate to the passing of time, and so catch "Beauty" before she falls. Yeats, in "Sailing to Byzantium," ¹³ expressed both the problem and the solution:

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
 A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
 Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing (ll. 9-11)

The final conquest of "the long moment of decay" is contained in the timeless, heraldic image of the bird that sits

upon a golden bough to sing
 To lords and ladies of Byzantium
 Of what is past, or passing, or to come. (ll. 30-32)

This is the enriching and creative nature of art, drawing on the tradition of the past (and Peake's novels are very dependent on tradition) to make meaning out of the present and to give consolation for the future. The artist shores up fragments against his ruins and makes a coherent and beautiful pattern of those fragments. ¹⁴

There is always the danger, however, that one may lose oneself completely in the world of one's creation and then find it inadequate to cope with the disruptive powers of the real world. Writing about Yeats, Frank Kermode has this to say:

He understands the tension between a paradigmatic order where the price of a formal eternity is inhumanity, and the world of the dying generations. . . . He was talking about this tension again in one of his last poems, when he distinguished between 'Players and painted stage' -- the justice of formal poems -- and 'the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart' -- the human dirt and disorder that underlie them. 15

The poet cannot afford to neglect the duality of his role -- he is both the "super realist" who sees "taut truth" and the one who "gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name." ¹⁶ In "The Circus Animals' Desertion,"¹⁷ however, Yeats describes a balance that has been upset. The splendid world that he had created, with its grand heroes and mythic quests, is revealed as a world of flight from reality rather than an imaginative framework within which reality could be made bearable. He travesties his earlier creations. They have become circus animals, freaks of nature and the tone is dismissive as he recalls "Lion and woman and the Lord knows what." The flimsiness of the dream world is stressed by the sense of fickleness with which his fancy moves from image to image, until the confession:

Players and painted stage took all my love,
And not those things that they were emblems of. (ll. 31-32)

In the final degradation of the dream world, Yeats reduces the images to the "things that they were emblems of":

A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. (ll. 35-38)

The complete disjuncture between real worlds and dream worlds is emphasised by the contrivance of the ladder which connects the two. It implies not a transformation of rags and bones, but an

obliteration of them, not re-creation, but "sub-creation." Tolkien explains the "sub-creator's" activity as follows:

He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. 18

As Rosemary Jackson points out, Tolkien's Middle-earth "is outside the human. An imagined realm with its own order, it is free from the demands of historical time, or of mortality." ¹⁹ It is a world of nostalgia, similar to Yeats's world of Oisín, Cúchulainn and the Countess Cathleen, a flight from the real, rather than an attempt to enter into a dialectical relationship with the real. Consequently, when the ladder disappears, there is only "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart," and a forced and defenseless confrontation with horror, decay, and the ridiculous sight of the plummeting charleychaplin man.

Just as "The Circus Animals' Desertion" travesties Yeats's fantasy world, so Peake travesties Gormenghast in the final and fragmented volume of his trilogy. Titus is forced to confront the possibility that Gormenghast, his home, is nothing but a figment of a deranged mind, as the vicious Cheeta presents the beloved inhabitants of the castle as players on a painted stage, horrific illusions that fall apart in sawdust and tinsel, "the battered masks, the hanks of hair; the Countess breaking in half, dusty and ludicrous; the sawdust; and the paint" (TA, p. 249). Through Titus, Peake, too, has to confront the universe of Gormenghast and the extent to which it has sustained or deluded him. Jackson asserts that, in contrast to Tolkien, Peake has created a world that "refuses nostalgia. He offers no false promise of redemption."²⁰ The suggestion, then, is that Gormenghast is not an image of flight from the real, but has emerged from a desire to confront and interrogate the real in order to take imaginative possession of it with all its mystery and uncertainty and, at the same time, to give significant pattern to it. Thus, if Peake's world draws its strength from the real world, there

is a possibility that when Gormenghast falls apart, the centre might still hold. The acknowledgements of the rags and bones having been implied all along, the bald confrontation with the mound of refuse might not be as devastating as it would for one who, in Henry James's words, has "cut the cable":

The only general attribute of projected romance that I can see, the only one that fits all cases, is the fact of the kind of experience with which it deals -- experience liberated, so to speak, experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered. . . . The balloon of experience is in fact of course tied to the earth, and under that necessity we swing, thanks to a rope of remarkable length, in the more or less commodious car of the imagination; but it is by the rope we know where we are, and from the moment that cable is cut we are at large and unrelated. . . .21

James, realist that he is, would prefer that the "sacrifice" of a "related state" be as well concealed as possible. But the sense of liberation found in romance, albeit a liberation controlled by its rootedness in actuality, is well expressed.

The question is whether or not Peake keeps control over his world, both real and imaginative, or whether he swings loose. Perhaps one of the central issues here concerns the difference between imagination and fancy. To what extent does Gormenghast represent the expression of the imagination which, in Coleridge's words, "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or, where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealise and to unify." Or, is it truer to say that he creates his world by means of the fancy, that which "has no other counters to play with but fixities and definites. . . . a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space. . . ." 22

If Peake's is an imaginative world, in these terms, its vitality, its life-giving power should enable a dynamic interaction with the real world. If it is simply fancy, it will give pleasure, certainly, but its ability to transcend the limits of this world, in order to harmonize and unify experience, will be severely vitiated. Fred Inglis, who seems to identify the "merely fantastic" with "fancy" in a rather loose way, criticizes Peake in these words:

The criticism of dead fiction is that it ignores history. It cannot interrogate its experience in terms of what has happened in a past from which the present comes. . . . It permits no interplay, no exchange between metaphor and reality, theory and practice. It is closed. This is its deadness. . . . The deadliness of such closure may be found in allegedly intellectual novels such as Mervyn Peake's or Herman Hesse's. These exhibit that lack of life which is due to their having no historical meaning. They are dead because they are merely fantastic. 23

Inglis' disparagement seems to be the result of a rather limited perception of what the fantastic implies -- a way of penetrating behind the masks of daily convention to reveal that which the mask represses, and so come to terms with it.

Written with great difficulty as Parkinson's disease took a progressively stronger hold on his mind, Titus Alone is the last and bleakest of Peake's completed novels. It is an overt re-creation of the reality of modern existence as his shattered mind perceives it, and as Titus perceives it beyond the walls of the Castle: "Here is no continuing city, here is no abiding stay." ²⁴ It is a world of flux and, with Cheeta's masque, one senses that the circus animals have deserted, it is the long moment of decay, the universe is absurd. The willingness, even need, to confront horror by means of an imagined world has, ironically, led to the artist being overwhelmed by that horror, as the Gormenghast that was meant to offer a means of control is finally unmasked as an illusion, while the mad grotesquerie central to its conception laughs mockingly. ²⁵

The masque is not the end of the novel however, and the above comments are not necessarily the final assessment of Peake's ability to sustain an imaginative relationship with the real world and its subjection to the passing of time. He seems to present, in Titus's final vision, the possibilities for a reconciliation between the artist's vision and the sordid daily grind, and implies that the tension in the image of "Garlic and sapphires in the mud" ²⁶ can lead to joy. The movement towards the synthesis is the subject of the following pages.

CHAPTER ONE : A PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Storm, harvest, flood or snow,
Over the generous country as I go
And gather helplessly,
New wealth from all I see
In every spendthrift thing -

"Coloured Money" (p.1)

Peake used the following lines from Bunyan as an epigraph for Titus Groan: "Dost thou love picking meat? Or would'st thou see / A man in the clouds, and have him speak to thee?" ¹ Through - out Peake's work we see him performing a dangerous balancing act between these two alternatives: becoming absorbed in daily realities or transforming them into an imaginative wonderland. This chapter will focus on the way these responses to the real are expressed in Peake's minor work. We shall enter Gormenghast by the back door, so to speak.

If the world is seen to provide either pleasure or pain, Peake's work seems to suggest that there are several ways of responding to it: one can enjoy that which is intrinsically beautiful and give expression to one's delight, or one can regain a sense of wonder by looking at the mundane from a fresh perspective; one can transform that which is frightening or grotesque by looking at it through laughter or compassion, or one can try to confront the violence of the world and give expression to one's fear, although this can lead to a sense of alienation and a surrender before that world. I have, thus, divided the treatment of Peake's minor work into the following sections: The Poetry of Enchantment, The Nonsense World, In Crazy Balance, and The Poetry of Disenchantment. The possibilities for wresting joy out of the fusion of these responses will be considered in the conclusion of this dissertation.

This treatment of Peake's work, in terms of his response to the real, cuts across chronology and genre. At the same period of his life, he can be found writing poems of enchantment and horror (for

example, the love poem "To Maeve" was written in 1940, the same year in which Peake wrote anguished war poems such as "May 1940" and "Fort Darland"). Similarly, he makes use of various genres, from poetry to children's stories to convey, for example, the "crazy balance" of life. This is not to deny that certain chronological and generic divisions make themselves felt. In terms of chronology, a darkening of vision towards the end of Peake's artistic life becomes more and more evident. In terms of genre, the lyric clearly serves his purposes best when responding to the immediacy of the surrounding world. The lyric is "preeminently the utterance that is overheard" when the poet "turns his back on his listeners."² Peake's lyrics are, then, the most direct artistic expression we have of his responses to the real.

It can be seen that the continuum of possible responses from enchantment to disenchantment is an image of the artist's dilemma outlined in the introduction: the act of focussing solely on the beautiful and ignoring that which gives pain can lead to disillusionment; on the other hand, the act of confronting pain can lead to mute horror. And yet, the artist, by definition, is the one who must sustain the tension, aware of pleasure and of pain at the same time, of order and chaos, of beauty and the grotesque, of the mask and the skull it hides. Jorge Luis Borges writes:

We (the undivided divinity operating within us) have dreamt the world. We have dreamt it as firm, mysterious, visible, ubiquitous in space and durable in time; but in its architecture we have allowed tenuous and eternal crevices of unreason which tell us it is false. ³

The artist not only accepts the fact of that falsity, he explores the truth of that unreason which tells him that the dream is false. (Borges' architectural metaphor is curiously appropriate when the dream centres on a mad and monolithic castle). The process of exploration does not end with the discovery of the dream's falsity, however. It can end with the re-assimilation of the dream at a level that makes it life-enriching.

The Poetry of Enchantment

In the words of an early and not entirely successful poem, Peake attempts to express his desire to explore beneath the surfaces:

If I could see, not surfaces,
 But could express
 What lies beneath the skin
 Where the blood moves
 In fruit or head or stone,
 Then would I know the one
 Essential
 And my eyes
 When dead
 Would give the worm
 No hollow food. (p.2, ll. 1-11)

The mysticism informing much of the poem leads to a lack of control over the images and an incoherent accumulation of mixed metaphors:

If I could feel
 My words of wax were struck
 By the rare seal
 Of crested truth,
 Then would I give bold birth
 To long
 Rivers of song. (ll. 39-45)

The tendency to abstraction and the attempt to achieve cosmic resonance create a sense of unformulated yearning for something "out there," a youthful extravagance that needs to learn the meaning of simplicity.

Peake is at his best when he relies on his gift for visual observation, the quiet detail, the response to concrete natural images, the enjoyment of "quirks and quiddities."⁴ (His tendency to step into the Titus books and make assertions about Titus being a "man," a "man in action," and "less than man"⁵ is a complementary example of the failure of abstraction in his work, in comparison with the splendid success of his treatment of that which is concrete, sensual).

To turn, then, to some of the finer lyrics, which express joy in the beauty of the world, especially the natural world:

I heard a winter tree in song
 Its leaves were birds, a hundred strong;
 When all at once it ceased to sing,
 For every leaf had taken wing. (p.4)

There is a sweet charm here. The nursery rhyme structure echoes the song of the birds, while the identification of the birds with the leaves comments delicately on the cycle of the seasons and the comfort of that cycle, the comfort of metamorphosis and its implications of a unity in the natural world that is gay and singing. It is only because it is winter that the tree can sing. Life and harmony find a natural foil in the bare tree. There is, nevertheless, a sense of loss and pathos as the birds fly off. The poet is without their ability to take wing: their freedom and the summer they take with them ("every leaf had taken wing") can be his only through sympathy and poetry.

"That Lance of Light" presents a different response to nature,, but still one aware of tensions:

That lance of light that slid across the dark
 To disappear a moment later, when
 A cloud like a great haystack with its angry
 Hair awry devoured it and then spat
 It out like the barbed war-head of a lyric,
 Sang earthward, and a million light-years later
 Pierced the green dark of a tall weed-hung vessel,
 And in a cup of honey-coloured light
 Hissed at the impact. (p.4)

Here, nature provides images of its own powerful sexual energy as the phallic lance of light gains momentum, structurally, through the enjambement. The "cloud like a great haystack" fuses the heavenly and the earthly to give the lance added impetus, and it penetrates the "tall weed-hung vessel." Lightning brings rain and fertility to the decaying earth; all elements of the cosmos are conjoined, yet separate, in an image that recalls the genesis of that cosmos when light, dark, heaven, water and land were separated but remained part of a controlling unitive force. The poem is built on a series of oppositions between dark and light, decay and fertility, that which destroys ("barbed war-head") and that which creates form ("lyric"), each necessary to the other. And over all there is a sense of

timelessness ("a million light-years later") containing the moment of impact, as that moment repeats an action that is primordial.

From the green and gold "honey-coloured light" of nature, Peake turns once more to the fresh and icy beauty of winter in a tribute to Robert Frost (p.5). Peake's self-judgement concerning his weakness for obscurity is rather touchingly conveyed here. On the other hand, the simplicity of expression in this poem is an ironic counterpoint to his self-deprecatory tone. One notes, all the same, the enduring delight in word play, seen in the implied pun on Frost's name and the distinction between old and new worlds / words.

The natural world is central to some of Peake's most beautiful poems -- those inspired by his love for his wife. "To Maeve," for example, displays a delicate simplicity and a fine control over the sustained metaphor (p.5). Where Peake uses urban imagery to describe himself, ⁶ Maeve is part of a sylvan world, suggesting the complementary nature of their relationship:

You walk unaware
Of the slender gazelle
That moves as you move
And is one with the limbs
That you have. (ll.1-5)

The unselfconsciousness of the identification between woman and gazelle suggests a mythic and wonderful world of wood nymphs and airy sprites, seen in terms of a timeless feminine grace and beauty.

The extra-temporal dimension that love makes available is also suggested in the following lines:

And I thought you beside me
How rare and how desperate
And your eyes were wet
And your face as still
As the body of a leveret
On a tranced hill
But my thought belied me
And you were not there
But only the trees that shook
Only a storm that broke
Through the dark air. (p.6)

But the still point is an illusion here. It barely restrains the storm; in itself it is "rare" and "desperate" and the expression of a desire thwarted by reality. The first six lines begin in media res with the conjunction "and" suggesting that the poem is a continuation of the poet's thought, which now, in desperation, finds articulation. The beloved is again presented as a part of the natural world, this time as a vulnerable, gentle leveret. Again, unselfconsciousness and integration of the self are suggested, this time by means of the image of the "face as still / As the body of a leveret." The face is equivalent to the body, expressing a unity of sensibility. There is no split between distancing intellect and the emotions. Nevertheless, it is a moment of unreality, of trance for the poet as the thought proves traitor and the reality of absence overwhelms him.

In both poems there is a sense of distance from the loved one. "To Maeve" presents the poet as observer of some mystical, almost fey creature wandering through a Botticelli landscape which is closed to him, while the second poem tries to cope with physical distance. Thus, even in his love for Maeve, Peake is aware of the vulnerability of that bond before the vicissitudes of reality. Like the world of Gormenghast, love can offer a defence against reality but cannot abolish it, indeed, draws much of its poignancy and sense of wonder from it:

In the fabric of this love
I hoard for you are lions wove,
Are eagles, and a dew-drenched lamb
Shuddering in the dawn's first beam.

In my fabric England mourns
And all I know that's lovely burns.
Never turn the arras over
Where the ghouls are, little lover! (p.6)

The agony of war-torn England is here made bearable by the love between man and woman, but like Arnold's "Dover Beach" the poem conveys the fragility of the barricade.

When Peake turns to the day-to-day world of men and women, he displays a delight in observing types. His habit of sketching heads continually on whatever came to hand, and his Dickensian

appreciation for the variety of London ("What a city for the head-hunter!")⁷ find verbal expression in such poems as "Sing I the Fickle, Fit-For-Nothing Fellows" (p.7), where he combines his own childhood love for pirate stories with his present fascination for "the empty-pocket boys." Again, his response is not a simple one. He sees the cocky hat, the quality of danger, arrogance and independence, he glamorises their past, but he also implies the fear and rootlessness of these men who "skid, without a needle or a star":

For whom no childhood sings, and no hereafter
Rustles tremendous wings. (11.5-6)

The London spivs are also the subject of "The Cocky Walkers" (p.8), a poem which explores the tensions between words and pictures and the problem of the artist who wishes to use both to express his world. In this poem the lighting of the cigarette is described by the artist rather than the poet, resulting in an interesting experiment in translating the visual into the verbal, something developed more fully in the trilogy:

Hummock the shoulder to the little flower
That lights the palm into a nightmare land,
A bloody basin of the sterile moon,
That lights the face that sprouts the cigarette
Into a sudden passion of fierce colour. (11.9-13)

These are "the lean heads" that "Cry out unwittingly for Rembrandt's needle," and Peake enjoys them enormously, their carelessness, their flashiness, "hats askew" and "fag alight," the spiv full of a kind of nervous, reckless energy. They have "burned their lives up to the quarter-mark" and "Tinkle upon tin feet that send no root." It is tempting to see in them forerunners of that later "flash boy, uncaught," Steerpike, and Peake's ambivalence as outside observer ("These are the flashy saplings whose domain / I cannot enter") is also common to his treatment of the villain of the Titus books.⁸

The female counterpart to "The Cocky Walkers" is the danseuse in "Palais de Danse" (p.9), the French title pointing to the sham glamour of the pre-war dance hall, with the suggestion

that it is suffering from a Jazz Age hangover ("O O O O that Shakespearean Rag").⁹ The fragile quality of the danseuse is reminiscent of Daisy Fay, while her heavily made-up face and the sleazy atmosphere suggest Myrtle Wilson, the frowsy mistress of Tom Buchanan. She combines both poignancy and tawdriness and Peake is sensitive to both aspects. Like a caterpillar, she might break out to become a butterfly:

Her evening-dress
Is splitting like the chrysalis,
And when she stirs
A caterpillar moves. (11.4-7)

Behind the mask of powder, the face, "Deadened with chalky pollen," hints at some "barbarous glory," it is "a brittle / And thoughtless miracle." Once more, Peake shows his admiration for unconscious energy, the foot "tap-tap-tapping on the floor." And, once more, there is the apparently incongruous image of the cigarette like a flower:

a white stamen with a burning anther
Is drooping from the flower tropical
That has two petals
Of dead, wet scarlet. (11.23-26)

Energy and decay are both present and one recalls William Blake's ironic line: "O what a multitude they seem'd, these flowers of London town!"¹⁰

This is also the London of Eliot's "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night."¹¹ There is the irony and the sordidness ("She comes / With a small shiny man"), the pathos ("that small / And callow head") and the brittle vitality and excitement:

Arise the fag-end boys from the tin-tables,
And slide into the hollow of the rhythm,
The crimson jazz is bouncing on the boards! (11.30-32)

As in "The Cocky Walkers" the combination of cigarette and tin is used to convey the burning out of these "sprigs" who inhabit the gaslit "chill nights" of the city with its echoing pavements.

The sympathetic, often excited curiosity with which Peake observes the people of his city, "the grotesque or delicate suffering at one's elbow, or the comedy of a world beyond control,"¹² is complemented by the need to reach beyond the immediacy of what is given to him, to make a plea for a return of a sense of wonder. He expresses frustration at the loss of legend and the belief in the strange and splendid creatures that are now only seen in private dreams.

In The Decay of Lying, Oscar Wilde, with customary flamboyance, states: "The only form of lying that is absolutely beyond reproach is lying for its own sake, and the highest development of this is. . . Lying in Art."¹³ He goes on to suggest that, one day, even the "solid, stolid British" will turn once more to "Romance, with her temper of wonder":

The very aspect of the world will change to our startled eyes. Out of the sea will rise Behemoth and Leviathan, and sail round the high-pooped galleys, as they do on the delightful maps of those ages when books on geography were actually readable. Dragons will wander about the waste places, and the phoenix will soar from her nest of fire into the air. We shall lay our hands upon the basilisk, and see the jewel in the toad's head. Champing his gilded oats, the Hippogriff will stand in our stalls, and over our heads will float the Blue Bird singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happen, of things that are not and that should be. ¹⁴

The longing for "what should be" is powerfully expressed in a controlled and suggestive poem, "When Tiger-men Sat their Mercurial Coursers" (p. 10). Here, Peake expresses a sense of missed opportunity, of having been born after his time. There is a dislocation between the poet and the world around him. Now, men live cut off from nature in cold and barren cities and nature is experienced in fugitive moments of birdsong, lightning or cracking frost. Then, man and beast were one with each other and one with the elements. The repetition of the introductory "when" implies the willed sense that there was once such a time, and is counterpointed by the plaintive cry, "I was not there..." suggesting loss, absence, and emptiness. The half-men, half-beast images evoke a primaeval world of consonance between rationality and violent energy -- the beginning of time,

before the stultifying and enervating effects of modern life began to corrode not only the body, but the imagination too. The spiv and the danseuse seem hopelessly attenuated figures next to these giant creatures full of passion and pain, whose actions are so convulsive: they shudder, thunder and shatter. This is, undoubtedly, a nostalgic poem. pervaded by a sense of helplessness in the face of a past world that seems fearless, "fierce" and "proud."

And, when the last of the great mythical beasts died, the whole world wept. Crying through the "blood-dark dawn" (comparisons with Lawrence are inevitable), they cannot survive our tepid sunlight. The disintegration, the separation has already begun in the "man with antlers" -- only antlers link him to the natural world where tiger-men and centaurs were entire. Does he cry with the same feeling of loss that the poet has? ¹⁵

Margaret Blount notes that "[t]here is an extraordinary feeling in the Bestiaries of the wonder and strangeness of the living world, full of freaks, beauty, dangers, mixtures and myths that might be true somewhere. The mermaid and unicorn exist, so do Basilisks and the Mantichora, the man-beast." ¹⁶

A determination that they shall exist is clear in "Victoria Station.6.58 p.m."

Sudden, beneath the pendant clock arose
Out of the drab and artificial ground
A horse with wings of scarlet, and pale flowers
Glimmered upon his forehead, while around

His neck and mane like wreaths of incense streamed
Young hosts of stars, and as his eyes burned proud,
The men with black umbrellas stood and stared
And nudged each other and then laughed aloud. (p.10)

Victoria Station epitomises the subjection of the commuters to the daily routine of urbanised, industrialised existence, where life is lived strictly by the clock ("6.58 p.m."). Eternity has been cut up and divided into discrete units just as people have been atomised. But the mythic world knows no such thing as time or history, fixities of space or identity, and into the limited and depressingly bourgeois world ("the drab and artificial ground," "men with black umbrellas") emerges, miraculously, something that is out of time, something bright, delicate, holy, full of the energy and pride of

tiger-men and centaurs. It is the mythic Pegasus, with its combination of vitality and promise of liberation ("wings of scarlet") and its ethereal celestial quality ("pale flowers / Glimmered upon his forehead"), haloed by the "Young hosts of stars." In his beauty and vibrancy, he challenges the "pendant clock" that swings remorselessly over men. His movement is vertical ("arose"), the clock's horizontal, one points up, one points monotonously down. The men are uncomfortable at this apparition; their own pride and energy is reduced to the image of the umbrella which provides shelter from the storm, rather than an encouragement to revel in nature. They recall Peake's Nonsense poem, "The Men in Bowler Hats are Sweet" (p.11), as well as the crowd that flows over London Bridge in The Waste Land and the men of facts in Hard Times. They "nudged each other and then laughed aloud." This is the conspiracy of the mediocre to mock that in which they cannot see a projection of self. Roland Barthes has this to say of the petit-bourgeois:

The petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself. . . . Sometimes--rarely--the Other is revealed as irreducible: not because of a sudden scruple, but because common sense rebels. . . . There is here a figure for emergencies: exoticism. The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown.

17

Of course, Barthes is referring to people as the Other, not to mythical beasts who appear in railway stations. But the description applies to the limited man who fails to respond to and enjoy that which is outside his immediate frame of reference.

In this poem, the petit-bourgeois can relate to Pegasus only by staring and laughing. For Peake it is the umbrella world that is "artificial" and the "wings of scarlet" that are real, and that will reveal themselves to those with eyes to see. There is a surrealistic quality about this image that relates the poem very clearly to the world of dreams and wish fulfilment. One thinks of the clocks that have melted, time become fluid, in Dali's The Persistence of Memory. Dali has written that the surrealists want to swim "against the current," and that the surrealists' aim is to achieve "that troubled depth, that irrational and moral hyperlucidity." ¹⁸ The concern with clarity

of vision relates Dali's comment to Peake's poem. The surrealist vision encourages the attempt to penetrate behind the appearances of daily reality. At the end of Le Paysan de Paris, Aragon had this to say: "Reality is the apparent absence of contradiction. The marvellous is the eruption of contradiction within the real." ¹⁹ The vision of Pegasus is Peake's call for this eruption of contradiction and the liberation of a fuller reality.

"The Cocky Walkers," "Sing I the Fickle, Fit-For-Nothing Fellows," and "Palais de Danse" reveal Peake's ability to find interest and excitement in the people around him. The tiger-men and the proud, winged horse indicate his desire to discover a richer reality by means of the creative powers of the artist's vision, drawing on the legendary past, "When fishes flew and forests walked / And figs grew upon thorn." ²⁰

The Nonsense World

The quotation from Chesterton, a great lover of Nonsense, suggests another way of transforming reality — by perceiving it from a quirky perspective, through the eyes of the donkey, for example. The shift in perspective is a feature of Nonsense and is clearly related to the tiger-men and centaurs, but this time seen through laughter. Roger Shattuck quotes Alfred Jarry as having said: "Laughter is born out of the discovery of the contradictory," and notes that for many surrealists "the contradictions and incompatibilities of experience lead straight towards laughter." ²¹ Laughter, in this context, is an expression of liberation and not, as in "Victoria Station," an expression of a defensive reaction against the world of wonder. The surrealistic effects that make for wonder in that poem, have their verbal counterpart in Nonsense.

For Freud, jokes and Nonsense were an important way of releasing inhibitions. In Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, he traces the "pleasure in nonsense" back to the child's enjoyment in playing with words for the sake of their sounds. As the reality principle encroaches on his life, the child is obliged to give up this play

"till all that remains permitted to him are significant combinations of words. But when he is older attempts still emerge at disregarding the restrictions that have been learnt on the use of words. Words are disfigured by particular little additions being made to them, their forms are altered by certain manipulations. . . or a private language may even be constructed for use among playmates." ²²

Freud goes on to quote the example of the student who "tries to rescue his pleasure in freedom of thinking" by means of "the cheerful nonsense of his Bierschwefel." ²³ Martin Esslin, writing on The Theatre of the Absurd, agrees with Freud, adding that "[t]he literature of verbal nonsense expresses more than mere playfulness. In trying to burst the bounds of logic and language, it batters at the enclosing walls of the human condition itself." ²⁴ To this extent it is a part of the Dadaist and Surrealist assaults on rationality, a part of the desire "to redeem language, to investigate the potential of the unconscious and to seek that mystical point at which contradiction resolves itself into synthesis." ²⁵

There is, however, another side to Nonsense. It may break the shackles of what we conceive to be logic, with its playful delight in the incongruous juxtapositioning of objects and ignoring of dictionary definitions, but several critics have pointed out that, to be successful, it must be carefully controlled. The Nonsense world has its own rules and, as in games, these rules must be obeyed. The most exhaustive and interesting analysis of this aspect is Elizabeth Sewell's The Field of Nonsense. ²⁶ She distinguishes sense from nonsense by pointing out that "[t]he assumption that you know what sense is, and consequently what nonsense is, depends not on the acceptance or rejection of blocs [sic] of fact but upon the adoption of certain sets of mental relations. Whatever holds together according to these relationships will be sense, whatever does not will be nonsense." ²⁷ She goes on to make the comparison with a game, which she defines as follows:

A GAME: the active manipulation, serving no useful purpose, of a certain object or class of objects, concrete or mental, within a limited field of space and time and according to fixed rules, with the aim of producing a given result despite the opposition of chance and/or opponents. ²⁸

The rest of the book analyses the objects and rules of the Nonsense game. Limitations must be imposed on number, time, space, things and language to prevent them from getting out of control, shifting their outlines, becoming part of dream rather than the logic of the game. Also of vital importance is the writer's detachment, for the emotions lead us back into reality and away from "that state of security, freedom and purely mental delight which is proper to the game."²⁹ The main aim of the Nonsense game is:

. . . to create a universe which will be logical and orderly, with separate units held together by a strict economy of relations, not subject to dream and disorder with its multiplication of relationships and associations. . . . From the dangerous ground of stars and diamonds we are led to bats and tea-trays, and so by means of separateness and distinctness in the elements and the particular nature of their combinations in Nonsense, we avoid poetry first, then dream, then delirium and madness.³⁰

In his book on Comedy and Culture, Roger B. Henkle draws together the liberating and the ordering qualities of Nonsense: ". . . it is often swept up in the exuberance of comic creation, the writer improvising and piling on richer and wilder creations and scenes for his own delight in them. . . . The exuberance of play, however, is often deliberately restrained by an arbitrary order of rules..."³¹ and Vivien Noakes, in her biography of Edward Lear offers this synthesis: ". . . perhaps it could be said that incongruity of characters, situations, or words, plus a predictable, stable element such as numbers, choruses, alliteration, or, paradoxically, an insistence on the correct use of words, equals nonsense."³²

Central to Nonsense is the concern with language, and its liberation from conventional definitions. It becomes, then, an opportunity for the writer to explore the relationship between language and its ability to create reality. It is also an opportunity for him to impose an invented language on an emptiness, as opposed to our usual practice of seeing fullness through a received language, in the sense that we have a complete vision of reality given to us by the language we inherit from our particular culture. The implication of this inherited language is that everything is as it

should be, nothing can be added or subtracted. Nonsense empties out this vision and replaces it with something else, often something private. Here is Humpty Dumpty's view on the matter:

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more or less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.'

'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master -- that's all.' 33

Here, it is a question of the dislocation between signifier and signified. The Nonsense word is described by Irving Massey as "the mark of the refusal to surrender the private reference of words, the use of words that has meaning only for oneself, and that brings the symbolic and the real order together, beneath language, in defiance of linguistics and epistemology." ³⁴ To carry the dislocation further is to give names to nothings, the made-up names, the portmanteau words. "They are themselves monsters," writes Massey, "centaurs, metamorphs, with two incompatible faces that we are forced to see simultaneously. They are nothing but objects, yet they mock us with a display of significance; and they challenge us to reduce them (but we cannot) to one role or the other." ³⁵

Quoting from Beckett's Molloy ("There could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names"), Rosemary Jackson links this darker view of the Nonsense game with a tendency, especially in modernist fantasy, to explore "the fantastic as words which are apprehended as empty signs, without meaning." ³⁶ She goes on to say:

The signifier is not secured by the weight of the signified: it begins to float free. Whereas the gap between signifier and signified is closed in 'realistic' narrative (as it is in classic narrative cinema), in fantastic literature (and in the cine-fantastic) it is left open. The relation of sign to meaning is hollowed out, anticipating that kind of semiotic excess which is found in modernist texts. 37

At this point, I would like to follow Janus's example by looking back to an earlier comment that Peake has created a Nonsense universe

and forward to the examination of the trilogy itself. Eric Drake, Peake's old schoolmaster, has pointed out that the first two syllables of Gormenghast are Chinese.³⁸ He analyses the characters and translates them as "every household" or "every house/door, every family." Peake, then, appears to have taken a word remembered from his childhood in Tientsin and combined it with an English word, "ghastly," and the ambivalence, the "two incompatible faces" that Massey refers to, is perfectly captured, for Gormenghast is at once home and hell, apparently full of a ponderous significance, but coming to suggest "an excess of signifiers deprived of meaning."³⁹

In the Nonsense poetry, however, the tone is lighter, giving names to no-things suggests, in Esslin's words, "all the spontaneous creations of fantasy freed from the shackles of reality and therefore able to create by the act of naming."⁴⁰ Walter de la Mare also stressed this fun aspect of Nonsense:

Twinkling on in its intense inane, it is as far out of the reach of the ultracommonsensical, the immitigably adult and the really superior as are the morning stars. That flat complacent veto--"This is nonsense!" (in the cast-iron sense of the word), while intended as a sentence of death, means little more than "We are not amused."⁴¹

There is, thus, a spectrum of attitudes to the relationship between Nonsense and the real, ranging from the sense of delighted liberation from ordinary logic to the sense of traumatic breakdown between things and their names, words and their meanings. It would be wrong to group Peake's work dogmatically into categories under headings such as "light" or "dark" as the one is frequently seen to contain the other. As his widow, Maeve Gilmore, points out, his vision has a "dual nature" which constantly sees "the seriousness within the absurd."⁴²

It is time, now, to turn to a few examples of Peake's Nonsense. It is noticeable how often he risks emotional content in these poems. There is, for example, an enjoyment of the animal and insect worlds from the tiniest flea to the ludicrous rhino, but the sense of loneliness and vulnerability of the smaller creatures is an undertone in both "Little Spider" and "O Little Fly" (p.12). As has been pointed out above, emotion is not allowed to enter a true Nonsense poem.

Nonsense is a way of controlling fears and sorrows and transmuting them into laughter. Thus, the enjoyment of the word-play in "Little Spider" works against Peake's tenderness for the little creature. Similarly, the sympathy for the fly is countered by the slightly ironic apostrophe and the sense of magnanimous social relations being set up between poet and fly for the moment. The fly is usually the victim of the swat, one of the most hard-done-by of creatures. "O'er Seas that have no Beaches" (p.13) is also a poem suggesting a lonely isolation which, again, is controlled, this time by the (albeit forlorn) incongruity of twelve peaches, a sofa and a swan, and the anti-climax of the last line. For Edward Lear, the sea was an almost constant image of sadness. According to Noakes, "[o]nly once did Lear see anything but sadness in a seashore, and that was at the end of 'The Owl and the Pussycat', when they danced by the light of the moon. 'We come no more to the golden shore where we danced in the days of old,' he quoted to himself over and over again' . . ."

⁴³

As in "O'er Seas that have no Beaches," the poet is in the position of loneliness and vulnerability in "An Old and Crumbling Parapet" (p.13), a poem reminiscent of "When Tiger-men" and "Victoria Station," with their nostalgia for a time when man was part of a mysterious natural world full of passion and awe. These are both dangerous emotions and again the techniques of Nonsense control them, releasing the tension in laughter. The "old and crumbling parapet" suggests the vast and crumbling walls of Gormenghast, while the sea is one of the most fluid and unitive of the elements. However, any tendency to dreaminess is countered by the flea, the incongruity and the randomness of its presence. The mood again shifts towards sentimental melancholy and a sense of the human need for a natural community. This mood is completely overturned by the flea's superb self-sufficiency: "I'm studying the Alphabet." There is also irony here -- the one seeking to communicate physically, the other abstractly, and it seems that never the twain shall meet. Thus, the potentially emotive qualities are undermined. The specifically nostalgic element appears in the last four lines, but before we have time to mourn the loss of legend, we are told that "purple tigers flopped down dead / Among the pictures and the paints." None of this is real, we are safe, it is all in the artist's controlling

imagination.

Nevertheless, this poem does seem to be less purely nonsensical than the others examined. The lyrical quality links it more clearly with the serious poetry and with the Nonsense poems in which Peake addresses his identity as artist most directly: "Tintinnabulum" (p.14), "I Cannot Give the Reasons" (p.19), "The Threads Remain" (p.20) and "Lean Sideways on the Wind" (p.21). The first of these indicates, by its title, both the Nonsense poet's enjoyment of unusual words and the centrality of the image of music, in this case the inner music of the poet which is being muffled by his bowler hat. Again, one recalls "Victoria Station" and the conflict between the fantasist and the philistine. The good spirit cajoles the poet:

'It is the tinkling, sir,' he said,
'Your face is pastoral
Behind its monstrousness are spread
The pastures lush and cool.

'Behind the hot, ridiculous
Red face of you, there ring
The bells of youth, melodious
As sheepfolds in a spring. (11.25-32)

But the poet is frightened of acknowledging the strangeness within him:

'It was not me, for I am not
The tinkling type, I said,
I am a businessman, I've got
A bowler on my head.' (11.69-72)

The spirit retorts that the bowler is merely the "symbol of the grave"(1.74) -- like the black umbrellas -- and urges the poet to give up his "soul." The poet confesses to his "inner bell" (1.185) and his whole body awakens and tingles:

And I was free! And now my goal
Is on a different plane
And I will never let my soul
Be rude to me again. (11.201-204)

This poem could be seen, albeit tentatively, as a Nonsense reworking of Yeats's "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" ⁴⁴ where the Soul calls the poet to the withdrawal of "the winding ancient stair" (l.1), while the Self urges him "to follow to its source / Every event in action or in thought" (ll.65-66), and the poet then "cast[s] out remorse" (l.68), as the Nonsense poet casts off his bowler hat, and tingles:

So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest. (ll.69-72)

Singing and poetry are necessary to the full enjoyment of life. That both poets use a dialogue form stresses the fact that they feel dual loyalties struggling within them. Yeats is as attracted to "the broken, crumbling battlement" (l.3) as Peake is to the "old and crumbling parapet," to withdrawal from conflict, but the tintinnabulum will not allow incarceration. In "I Cannot Give the Reasons," Peake delights in telling us how his Nonsense rejects "reasons" and all that is "didactic" and "lucid," while revelling in the strange exuberance of sounds and images of the fancy, responding to all the secret delights of nature and language "denied to those whose duty / is to be cerebral." In this sense, even the fancy reveals a certain courage in looking beyond the accepted reality. There is also an interesting correlation between Peake's description of the Nonsense world in this poem and the world of the Titus books. The latter, too, sing "the sadness of the seasons / the madness of the moons." One thinks of autumn creeping sullenly through the Castle, as Sepulchrave calls to the owls. In the Titus books there is, furthermore, an abundance of language of "gorgery and gushness / and all that's squishified," countered often by "a beauty / most proud and terrible," as young Titus makes his way "Among the antlered mountains."

"The Threads Remain" is an equally self-conscious poem in which the poet determines to "classify [his] loves" because of his "Disorganized desire to live / Before it's time to die." The passing of time is central to the poem as the poet considers the fragile left-overs of his ephemeral world. His ability to live is defined in terms of his ability to love the threads, cord, twine and rope, the world which he

holds together and which holds him. Love for friends and self frame his love for the threads, and having pulled the threads together, having canalized his chaos, he settles down optimistically to a new and ordered life. The last two lines are gently ironic -- this new order will not last long, for he is "Half magical, half tragical" and that duality does not permit of any easy order.

In "Tintinnabulum," the conflict is between the world of restraint and convention and that of dreams and fulfilled desires; in "I Cannot Give the Reasons," it is between rationality and fantasy; in "The Threads Remain," it is between the tragedy of time passing and the magic of the threads, and in all three there is the danger of dreams, fantasy and magic fading into conventions, reason and history. The circus animals constantly threaten to desert, Pegasus might easily disappear under "the drab and artificial ground." This is rather beautifully expressed in a tender Nonsense lyric, where the lyricism is not completely contained even by Uncle Eustace and his kitchen floor, or the throw-away last line:

Lean sideways on the wind, and if it bears
Your weight, you are a daughter of the Dawn --
If not, pick up your carcass, dry your tears,
Brush down your dress -- for that sweet elfin horn

You thought you heard was from no fairyland --
Rather it flooded through the kitchen floor,
From where your Uncle Eustace and his band
Of flautists turn my cellar, more and more

Into a place of hollow and decay:
That is my theory, darling, anyway.

In contrast with the wistful quality of the above poem, there are the anarchic poems where the urge to violence, even sadism, is released through laughter. " 'Come, Break the News to Me, Sweet Horse' " (p.22) relies on both word and picture for its comic impact. The tone is marked by an ironic ceremoniousness as the absurd non-communication between man and horse is finally resolved by the horse kicking the man on the chin and dying. "He will be missed / By all who cherished him," declares the victim of the kick with feigned piety. The illustration accompanying the poem depicts an ungainly animal with a tiny waistcoat and a huge head, grinning with smug malice while a scraggy child sits hunched on his back, brooding on the intractable

beast whose verbal answers are as opaque as his physical answer is to the point. Here, violence and antagonism between man and beast is rendered laughable through the crazy non-sequiturs and the mockery of tone:

'I find your answer rare, Sweet Horse,
Though hardly crystal-clear.

Of course, the horse's answer is crystal-clear, by Nonsense standards of clarity, which are not reducible to common concepts of clarity.

Speaking of the cruelty in Edward Lear's limericks, Martin Esslin points out: "In a universe freed from the shackles of logic, wish-fulfilment will not be inhibited by considerations of human kindness." ⁴⁵ Lear's cruelty is usually realistic, however. People smash and bash each other and there is a crisp justice about it all. The cruelty in "Shrink, Shrink" (p.23) is far more disturbing. Playing on husband-wife-mother-in-law relationships, the poem parodies the marriage vows and the autocratic rights of sadistic husbands. As in the poem, "Satan" (p.26), the spirit of perversity (here without the heroic associations of the fallen angel) gets tired of smooth beauty and demands the ambivalent excitement of ugliness and sin. The agonizing metamorphosis and the mean, spiteful tone destroy the fun essential to Nonsense.

Metamorphosis into a lump of sin may not be very appealing, but metamorphosis into an animal, especially one intrinsically resembling the person may be a source of amusement, as in "Aunts and Uncles" (p.24). The idea that everyone contains a beast inside himself which could overwhelm him, is given much more horrific treatment in Boy in Darkness. Margaret Blount suggests that "[h]eraldic creatures or mythical mixtures of parts are supposed to have been created that way, complete and finished. But creatures that have grown warped and monstrous with time and misfortune symbolise too much that is warped in human nature for comfort." ⁴⁶ Nonsense takes the warped side of human nature and the frightening aspects of metamorphosis and redeems them for laughter. The metamorphoses of "Aunts and Uncles" are quite logical and the implied reactions of the human presences in the poems are unsurprised, rather like a Nonsense treatment of Gregor Samsa's initial response to becoming a dung-beetle: ⁴⁷

When Aunty Flo
 Became a Crow
 She had a bed put in a tree;
 And there she lay
 And read all day
 Of ornithology.

And here is the response to Uncle Jake:

When Uncle Jake
 Became a Snake
 He never found it out;
 And so as no one mentions it
 One sees him still about.

Aunty Mig (who became a pig) has clear physical, if not temperamental, affinities with the "nameless thing," "A fairy like a William Pear - / With but itself to blame." It has chilblains on its knees, she has warts on hers and both fly through the air. However, where she has "irritation in her heart," the strange fairy flies through the air with "smug" contentment. The floating "pug" is a charming Nonsense creature, so self-contained among onlookers who can only respond to the alien in terms of staking a claim or declaring it guilty of trespassing. Its smugness is characteristic of a number of Peake's creations: the Sweet Horse and Uncle Jake are illustrated this way, and we see it in Mr. Pye, Bellgrove, and the socialites in Titus Alone. The difference is that the smugness of the fairy is due to its self-possession and freedom to soar where mortals may not go, while the smugness of the Horse is destructive and that of Uncle Jake and the characters in the novels is symptomatic of imaginative myopia.

Related to this world of anthropomorphism and Nonsense names and creatures are two books for children, which also depend heavily on the interrelationship between word and picture: Letters From A Lost Uncle and Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor.⁴⁸ Letters From A Lost Uncle is a series of illustrated letters to the Uncle's nephew, telling him of great adventures in the Arctic, leading to the search for the White Lion. This book draws on Peake's childhood love of adventure stories and tales of far-flung, exotic places, and also echoes some aspects of Titus's experiences. In both we find men who need to dedicate themselves to a quest, a quest which inevitably

leads to a flight from women. The one-legged Uncle, who was "born in Tulse Hill but ran away within a week" (p.23), later flees his wife when she becomes "not so considerate as she used to be" (p.26). He sails away to the tropics on a table:

. . . there I was, all those years ago, having jumped off the boat and sitting on the moonlit table, tossing on the waves, a bit lonely with the deep sea muttering around me.

Yet after a bit I began to realize that this was just the sort of thing for which I had been craving in London. Why had I left England? For this sort of thing, of course. Then, instead of feeling lonely I felt happier than I had ever felt in my life before. (p.37)

He takes on, as his trusty retainer, Jackson the "turtle dog," whom he treats with a mixture of affection and irascibility. After many adventures, they arrive in a wonderland of ice, of "tragedy," "magic" and "danger" (pp.97-98). Here, all the polar beasts have gathered to mourn the passing of the great blind White Lion, who is described in a splendid finale:

He reared up on his hind legs, opened his great jaws, spread his paws as big as white hassocks against the air and with a roar that set the high spires jangling -- froze to death.

He had become ice. He had crystallized. It does not matter what words I use to describe it, for there he was, and there he will be forever, alone and beautiful in the wild polar waste -- alone in his cathedral, my Lion of white ice. (pp.119-120)

The magic world of the Lion is reminiscent of the worlds traversed in C.S.Lewis's The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, while the White Lion is very like Aslan.⁴⁹ Peake, however, turns to ancient folk tale and legend rather than to religious allegory, and the Lost Uncle becomes a universal figure, an Everyman on a quest for the numinous, conceived here as a primaevae world of natural splendour.

The visual presentation is very important in this book. The faulty typing and splotches of Jackson's paws are interspersed and interrupted with drawings of the landscapes through which the Uncle travels, drawings that often serve as a release from verbalizing

his experiences: "Oh, Blubber! I've been such a long time without a drawing. It comes as a great relief to stop prodding at this little black machine, and start making pictures again" (p.22). The pictures are an excellent complement to the text, filling in what the Lost Uncle leaves out, notably the suffering of his turtle dog retainer. In the text, Jackson is present mainly as a smudge on the typescript. In the illustrations, poor Jackson becomes a personality, with his ragged scarf and glum, mournful eyes, sneezing with a cold or drawing the Uncle along in a sled. As his name implies, but as the pictures make clear, the turtle dog is a hybrid animal in a quasi-human relationship.

The illustrator, Roger Duvoisin, argues that "an illustration can tell a story without the help of a text. In this wider meaning, an illustration is a form of independent writing. It is pictorial literature."⁵⁰ Where the Lost Uncle makes this point explicitly by using pictures to tell the story when he does not feel like writing, Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor makes the point by reducing the verbal content even more radically.

Captain Slaughterboard and his terrifying cutthroats invade an island to capture a Yellow Creature, "as bright as butter" (p.18), who goes willingly enough for he has been lonely on an island where "nearly all the other creatures were purple" (p.23). The Captain becomes most attached to the Yellow Creature and enslaves his crew to the bulbous-eyed bi-ped with its curly hair growing down its back. The fond pair, who have dined and danced together, decide to settle on the island, and the last three pages indulge Peake's desire to draw exquisite fish caught by the Captain and the Yellow Creature. There is a wonderful Oriental ornateness about them curiously at odds with the grotesque Captain and his grisly crew, great monstrous men.

Margaret Blount suggests, quite appropriately, that the story is told "in the visual language of Breughel and Bosch."⁵¹ There is a macabre quality about the crew and a touch of decadence about Timothy Twitch's elegant left hand. The creatures on the island are a mixture of the weird and the witty; the drawings show how dignified and pompous the Dignipomp is, for example. Ultimately, however, the grotesque is modulated in such a way by humour that it never becomes truly frightening. The peculiar Yellow Creature, for example, is gentle and companionable, and the relationship between it and the Captain

is much more congenial than that between the Lost Uncle and Jackson. The Yellow Creature is referred to as "he," but "does the cooking and can make the most exciting things to eat out of practically nothing" (p.44). We see a picture of the two happily entwined under a tropical plant, the Captain asleep, the Yellow Creature smirking languorously at the reader, the epitome of connubial contentment. Blount's assessment is a fair one:

This is gentle nightmare, a bad dream with the evil removed so that what remains is strangeness and goodwill. Every odd anomaly that one has ever seen in the aquarium or tropical house might be saying: look at me long enough and there's nothing to fear. 52

The grotesques, like those of A Book of Nonsense and Rhymes Without Reason,⁵³ provide a refreshing break from saccharine insipidity, what Maurice Sendak calls the "shiny, screeching banalities" of, for example, Walt Disney.⁵⁴ As Frances Sayers pointed out in a useful interview: "The minute you have a collective illustration, you lose one of the great qualities of an illustrator, which is his own style, his own conviction."⁵⁵ In a letter to the Los Angeles Times she wrote:

Mr. Disney has his own special genius. It has little to do with education, or with the cultivation of sensitivity, taste, or perception in the minds of children. . . . I find genuine feeling ignored, the imagination of children bludgeoned with mediocrity, and much of it overcast by vulgarity. Look at that wretched sprite with the wand and the over-sized buttocks which announces every Disney program on TV. She is a vulgar little thing, who has been too long at the sugar bowls. 56

Mervyn Peake endorsed this attack on sentimental mediocrity, in practice and in theory. The two children's books just discussed are evidence of the former. For evidence of the latter, we may turn to a BBC talk which he gave in 1954. Discussing his treatment of the Alice books, he had the following to say:

There are times when it's right to gild the lily and to paint the rose as long as it's truly and skilfully gilded and boldly painted. So often the gilt does nothing but harm to the lily and plays a sickly and sentimental

role -- a role perhaps, in the last resort, dictated by neurotic parents who don't realize that their children are much tougher than they are themselves. I have often found that children love to look at pictures and drawings which the parents consider ought to be frightening. Children don't think about the implications.

" 'Off with their heads!' cried the Red Queen." 57

It is clear that Peake sees drawing and illustration as having the same liberating function that is a characteristic of verbal Nonsense. Pictures should not lull; they should stimulate. In Letters From A Lost Uncle and Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor, Peake uses his intensely individualistic style (which nevertheless draws on the great illustrators whom he once listed as "Rowlandson, Cruikshank, Bewick, Palmer, Leach, Hogarth, Blake; and the Frenchman Doré, Granville, and the German Dürer, and Goya the Spaniard")⁵⁸ to promote a new visual awareness of the richness of reality to complement the stories, which themselves move beyond straightforward adventure stories to suggest more disturbing undercurrents. For example, in both these children's books, the anthropomorphic creatures contribute something bizarre to the idea of companionship and one is tempted to draw a parallel with the pattern in American literature, noted by Leslie Fiedler, of the "anti-family of two" in a natural landscape, away from women and the restrictions of civilization.⁵⁹ It is with great glee that the Lost Uncle, in many ways an aged Huck Finn writing his memoirs, throws his collar into the sea: "Since then I have never worn a collar and I shall never start that sort of nonsense again," he says (p.29). In isolation it seems, the normal laws of social and sexual relationships are suspended. The transgression of these laws, like the transgression of laws of linguistics and logic in Nonsense, is acceptable and escapes criticism if it is turned into comedy or children's literature or, as here, both. The longing for flight from women and civilization is thus expressed and the wish-fulfilling powers of fantasy are exerted.

Generally, then, Nonsense is seen, in the poems and stories just discussed, to be a mode of fulfilling the desire to create the world anew, however eccentric the vision of the creator. G.K. Chesterton believed strongly in the vital necessity of responding to the fresh insights into the world provided by Nonsense:

So long as we regard a tree as an obvious thing, naturally and reasonably created for a giraffe to eat, we cannot properly wonder at it. It is when we consider it as a prodigious wave of the living soil sprawling up to the skies for no reason in particular that we take off our hats, to the astonishment of the park-keeper. Everything has in fact another side to it, like the moon, the patroness of nonsense. Viewed from the other side, a bird is a blossom broken loose from its chain of stalk, a man a quadruped begging on its hind legs, a house a gigantesque hat to cover a man from the sun, a chair an apparatus of four wooden legs for a cripple with only two. 60

Nonsense thus becomes an important way of finding what Roger Sale, in his book Fairy Tales and After, calls "new bearings, and thereby new ways to see and understand" what has always been "value[d] deeply." 61 Sale is speaking specifically of children's literature, and it is clearly of some importance that the writer of children's stories should be true to those values and to his vision of the world. C.S. Lewis has criticized those writers who make conscious divisions between children's literature and adult literature, an activity that leads to condescension and insincerity. "The only moral that is of any value," he writes, "is that which arises inevitably from the whole cast of the author's mind. . . . We must write for children out of those elements in our own imagination which we share with children. . . ." 62

The ability to value both the everyday (picking meat) and the extraordinary (speaking to a man in the clouds) is evident in all Mervyn Peake's work, be it addressed to children or to adults. Allied to this sensitivity is an acute awareness of the fears and horrors of human existence. In the Nonsense and the children's stories this darker vision is muted: sadness becomes whimsical, the nightmare becomes gentle, but Peake remains true to his vision of "tears" and "strange laughter" that makes the world so rich and various. It seems appropriate to conclude this section with Peake's own comments on Nonsense, and so return to the sense of fun that is so important:

Nonsense can be gentle or riotous. It can clank like a stone in the empty bucket of fatuity. It can take you by the hand and lead you nowhere. It's magic -- for to explain it, were that possible, would be to kill it. It swims, plunges, cavorts, and rises in its own element. It's a

fabulous fowl. For non-sense is not the opposite of good sense. That would be "Bad Sense." It's something quite apart -- and isn't the opposite of anything. It's something far more rare. Hundreds of books are published year after year. Good sense in many of them: bad sense in many more -- but non-sense, oh no, that's rarity, a revelation and an art worth all the rest. Perhaps one book in every fifty years glitters with the divine lunacy we call nonsense. 63

Buckets and birds, a lunacy that is divine, an art that cannot be explained but that people insist on trying to explain (including Peake, for what is the above if not one kind of explanation?) -- these are the incongruities of the Nonsense world. But they are also the incongruities of human experience, which can never be fully explained. They are the incongruities that cause human beings to search for an overarching vision or to be torn apart.

In Crazy Balance

One of John Donne's best known sonnets opens with these lines:

I am a little world made cunningly
Of elements, and an angelic sprite,
But black sin hath betrayed to endless night
My world's both parts, and, oh, both parts must die. 64

The painful and incongruous juxtaposition of good and evil in human nature that is the subject of Donne's poem is also the subject of much of Peake's work, where the nightmare resists becoming gentle. An interesting example of how similar subject matter can receive a different treatment so that the nightmare is central, is provided by Peake's short story, Mr Slaughterboard, written between 1933 and 1936 (Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor was published in 1939). 65

In Mr Slaughterboard, we find the "Conger Eel," crewed by a collection of monsters -- the blind hunchback Smear, who reads the classics with his enigmatic captain, and his valet, the dwarf Shrivel, Mr. Bloodseye the gunner, disgustingly and barbarically tattooed, Grinner, whose mouth has been stretched from ear to ear by torturers, and Scrug - throat, a piratical Caliban. Peake turns to detailed verbal description

to isolate these creatures in a world of horror that is lacking in the children's version where the drawings are paramount and full of weird humour. Roger Sale, discussing the stories of Dr. Seuss and Jean de Brunhoff, makes the following observations:

If Dr. Seuss fights dragons by walking between their legs, de Brunhoff fights his by staring at them, by insisting he knows the limits of the dragons' power, since even the most shocking moments will last no longer than the most satisfying ones: both take no longer than two facing pages.

I could not say as a child how all this was done, but could receive "Look at the pictures" as the essential message of the text and not get the wrong message at all. It is no accident that my happiest moments of reading aloud to my children were with the Babar books. I could watch the child stare at the pictures, solemn but never frightened, amused but never laughing, and derive my own pleasure from the way the apparently skimpy text released us both into enjoying the pictures. 66

Preventing us from being released in the way Sale speaks of, the verbal descriptions in Mr Slaughterboard have macabre and unearthly resonances, which abstraction and metaphor make available. The Yellow Creature caught by Slaughterboard becomes quite fearsome in this story:

"Suddenly a horrid yellow laugh rang out from above. It almost smelt yellow. It was a laugh that was derisive and wild and more than a little insane" (p.87). How does one convey a yellow smell in a picture? But the Yellow Creature is peripheral to the main interest and the story of its capture is included as a digression, more to emphasize certain aspects of the captain's character than for its intrinsic interest.

The captain is a composite figure: like Sepulchrave, he loves books; like a stereotyped Nazi, his love of art is combined with a love of sadistic entertainment. He is also a decadent pirate and a side-show freak. The detailed topography of Bloodseye's tattoos is echoed here in the description of Slaughterboard:

As he turned his head slowly it was as though the map of an island was being carefully unrolled so that one could read the jottings which covered its irregular face. Jottings such as, 'Dangerous swamp for fever flies,' 'Quicksands, Fingering sank here' and 'Cut up the Porcupine crew, at base of this ridge' and so on. Slowly the head turned. The scars and the wrinkles, the deep pits in the flesh, and the blue of the bone where the skin was thin with old scars --

if these had been words they would not have spoken more clearly. It was a death's head, the head of a devil -- yet wait. The shade of his hat had cast a deep shadow over the eyes. For a moment the monstrous face turned heavenward, and the moon shone into the eyes as tender as a girl's. Deep coloured like sherry, and as clear. They seemed to say 'I love you.' (pp. 67-68)

In the Titus books, Peake makes extensive use of the idea of the face as landscape of the individual soul. Here, however, the face is the landscape of all that is horrible and all that is lovely in human experience. The ambiguity of the captain, with scarred face and tender eyes, is seen, too, in his hands, one of which is "formed in the shape of an elephant's foot" and is "flaking and dry" (p.69). On this hoof dangles a silver and gold bangle, while his other hand is "like a woman's, as soft and as white" and he flutters it "gently to and fro in front of his crew. . . in evident relish at its beauty" (p.69P. This uneasy mixture of the beautiful and the hideous leads to the warping of the captain's aesthetic sensibility so that the only way he can express it (apart from excursions to the library) is to sacrifice his crew to the sea, whenever its beauty calls: ". . . the ocean is a deep purple. It is the colour of a bruise, and when the water is deep purple, I feel it is hungry for more" (p.68).

After the sacrifice, he ponders on Shakespeare's The Tempest and its lyric on the sea-change. The meditative mystery of this play pervades Peake's story in a curiously distorted way. The Yellow Creature's enthusiastic response to Slaughterboard reminds one of Miranda's "O brave new world, / That has such people in't!"⁶⁷ In Peake's story, however, the mystery is undermined by the odiously pompous rhetoric of the captain expounding on the arts: "The intellectuals are dependent on the intelligentsia. But the intelligentsia are not materially dependent upon the intellectuals" (p.75). Also countering the contemplative mood, is the lurid and diabolical glow associated with those other tales of the damned drifting over endless purple seas -- The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Moby Dick, and, as in Melville's tale, the flight from women into a male community is a central theme:⁶⁸

Alone in that vast circle of ocean, any point of whose circumference might form the centre of another circle as vast and as unbroken, stood that crew of human ghouls, sat Slaughterboard, stood Smear. They formed their own

Universe. Untouched by the workings of other minds, solely dependent upon themselves, they formed a cosmos of existence, a reality that moved and thought between the sea and the sky. A silence more insistent than the monstrous beating of a drum welled into a kind of atmospheric pain. (p.79)

At this point, the ship, a self-sufficient world very much like Gormenghast, has found itself impaled on a sharp rock and it hangs suspended in time and space until the end of the story, when Slaughterboard holds a sports day consisting of such violent or impossible races (swimming to the horizon and back) that only seven people are left on board above a sea that is, ultimately, alien to man: "Man is not of the ocean. . . .She will arise. And man -- man -- poor idiot in his painted boat -- down, down, down!" (p.91).

The absurdity of man's position half-way between the animals and the angels is captured graphically in the final image of Slaughterboard, gazing at the water in silence and solitude, wondering and uncomprehending, a part of the scene and yet alienated from it. The image recalls the final scene in Werner Herzog's film, Aguirre, Wrath of God, where we see the mad Aguirre circling round and round in the middle of the Amazon, declaring himself conqueror after having killed off all his crew. ⁶⁹

Thus, the grotesque is employed here as a means of presenting the vision of the duality of human experience. We are made aware of the conflict between beauty and distortion, between the artist's dream of order and variety held in tension and the inescapable weakness for disorder and violence. We see the desire for control shattered by the reality of helplessness in the face of a natural world we can never fully understand. Peake also shows that the rejection of the land's security can be fatal. At the end of the story the sea-change implies the gradual disintegration of the ship. Yielding oneself up completely to the artistic vision can become the "long moment of decay."

If Mr Slaughterboard presents us with an image of man's duality seen as a grotesque reflection, Mr Pye presents us with that same image haloed in sunlight. ⁷⁰ The issues raised by the latter are serious ones, but the tone is whimsical. Where Slaughterboard is seen suspended motionless in silence at the end of his story, Mr. Pye floats off towards the moonlight at the end of his.

Peake's "minor" novel tells of a sprightly, portly little bachelor who eats fruit-drops and has Tevye-like chats with his Great Pal. Filled with missionary zeal and an intense desire to open the eyes of the world to the vistas of heaven on earth, he sets out for Sark, an island which is "just the right size" (p.11) for beginning his task. His energy, all-enveloping smile and alert intelligence soon win over the entire island, including Miss Dredger, his redoubtable, chain-smoking landlady who lends all her hockey-playing energy and stubborn English hardihood to the cause of the Great Pal. Only Tintagieu (Tanty), the voluptuous, amoral, warm and generous Sarkese whore and her admirer, the artist Thorpe, are unimpressed.

A moonlight picnic, meant to be the climax of the initial stages of the island's conversion, is ruined by the failure of the obese and cantankerous Miss George to live up to the image of a martyr by descending a cliffside chimney in an armchair, and by the pervasive smell of a dead whale floating offshore. After this disaster, Mr. Pye sprouts wings, and Harley Street fails to cure him. Deciding that the wings are a sign of his unearthly goodness, the little missionary decides to counteract them by turning to evil and he succeeds so well that he grows horns instead. In an act of humility, he presents his horned self to the island and escapes their wrath with the help of Tanty. The horns recede, the wings grow magnificently, and he flies off the island.

The novel blends comedy with violence, bathos with pathos in a way common to much of Peake's work, evidence of his concern to show the variety of life, the good and the bad, the strong and the weak. As he says through the character of Mr. Pye: ". . . above all the foibles of the individual were a kind of gift to God. It was the uniform, the grey, drab, unimaginative approach to life that was such an insult to the Great Pal whose very essence was variety" (p.79). Thus, the meticulous, realistic detail of the descriptions of Sark are countered by the grotesque death of Miss George as she tumbles down the stairs, hairy purple busby stuck firmly to her head. "She is pure Goya," says Thorpe. (p.165). Of course, Pye's metamorphoses are the most obvious example of this delight in mixing the strange with the ordinary, and are among the elements which relate the novel to the world of Nonsense.

Mr. Pye suggests towards the end of his ordeal: "Perhaps I am a metaphor -- and one day I'll fit the thing I'm metaphorising" (p.229). By being forced into the moral gymnastics of keeping wings and horns at bay, he already does fit the thing he is "metaphorising" -- the eternal human struggle to control the conflict between the aspiration towards heaven, goodness, beauty and love, and the equally strong temptation to succumb to hell, evil, distortion and hate. Inability to control that tension can lead either to the passive ineffectuality of Thorpe, the painter, or to throwing in one's lot completely with good or evil.

Pye attempts to translate the aspiring imagination into action in the most literal way: "From now onwards my target is no less than the very conscience of this island. I will not rest until it is inflamed with a new spirit" (p.59) and, for Miss Dredger, "Mr Pye had unlatched a window and flung it open, and there lay stretched before her a virgin country with forests and hills, to be cleared, to be climbed" (p.61). Pye's Utopian vision destroys boundaries and barriers. The Great Pal is also "this Alcoran, this Ly-King, this Vedas, this Purana, this Zenavesta, this Shaster, this Zantama, this Mormon" (p.198), who is in a piece of toast, the porridge, even Miss Dredger's cigarette (to her discomfiture). "It is all interwoven," Mr. Pye assures her. "One cannot segregate things in that arbitrary way -- words and illnesses, tadpoles and tears, volcanoes and dominoes are all interwoven. What affects one thing affects all the rest" (p.127). It is a "pan-determinism" that uses Nonsense to find faith.⁷¹ It is T.S.Eliot's Hippopotamus floating up to heaven:

I saw the 'potamus take wing
Ascending from the damp savannas,
And quiring angels round him sing
The praise of God, in loud hosannas. ⁷²

"Eliot implies," writes Elizabeth Sewell, "that the way for a Nonsense poet to reach heaven is by Nonsense itself. . . ." ⁷³ and Mr. Pye, as he confesses his metamorphosis into a devil to Tanty, Thorpe and Miss Dredger, also confesses that he was "once particularly fond" of Nonsense. He quotes one of his poems, which turns out to be "O'er Seas that have no Beaches" (p.230).

The isolation expressed in this poem is something that has

enveloped the little missionary all his life, "he had always been alone in one sense or another" (p.139), but this aloneness takes on a different meaning when the wings begin to sprout. On his arrival at the island, Mr. Pye is seen to be totally engrossed in his mission and he sees in himself the special agent of the Great Pal, every atom integrated into his sense of his special destiny. He is not a little smug and complacent in his attitude to the people he meets, for they are not individual personalities but the instruments for achieving the good of the Great Pal, and Pye practises a conscious manipulation of them. When people greet him on the boat going to Sark, he does not reply, except by "intensifying that smile of his": "It was as though he were saying: 'Yes, yes . . . there is time for all that, later: we will be friends before long, no doubt (for the future is big with promise) . . . but for the moment, my friends, be patient -- the time is not yet ripe'" (pp.9-10). He magnetizes the island with his silence as he whips around, exploring every nook and cranny, and then entrances it with his intellectual sparkle.

The moonlight picnic, to which he invites the whole island, is the climax for him, for "it was not every day that he could claim to be putting into action what he believed in spirit -- to be watching his belief bare fruit" (p.113). Nevertheless, his constant reference to the Great Pal as the author of all his actions is countered by his delight in his own directing of the chosen players and poor, fat Miss George is nearly killed, to satisfy Pye's need for a martyr: " 'My dear,' he whispered, 'you are to be my first martyr...' " (p.113). In being lowered down the cliff chimney, she is to demonstrate that "through fear. . . she is being purged"(p.117). She is to be an example to the island of "courage, high courage" which "can explode as it were with beauty and transfigure even the most simple of heart and mind, and the least heroic of frame and limb" (p.117). Needless to say, Miss George disagrees violently and Pye's unintentional cruelty has its just reward in her undying hatred. He has revealed the danger of being so "heavenly minded that he is of no earthly use." It is all very well for him to exhort the islanders to face fear and evil, in order to realise their humanity, when he has never, apparently, been through the ordeal himself: "Crocodiles are fearless through stupidity. We do not look to them for spiritual guidance. They cannot recognise fear

any more than they can recognise evil. . . .But man is not like that. . . ." (p.118).

Pye's inability to empathise with the terror of Miss George, the artistic frustrations of Thorpe ("Fall back into the arms of Our Pal, and let your pastels do the work for you. After all, you are only the medium -- the glass pipe as it were." p.88), or the innocent lustful life of Tanty ("A wild and primitive child. . . . She needs Our Pal very badly. . . . What are we here for but to bring salvation. We are not here for our own pleasure, but to gather the outcasts to our heart." p.128), is soon to change as he learns how to be a human being. He learns that he was not born into the world single and entire and that there are areas of his life, of his being that demand confrontation. When Miss George fails to be a martyr and the dead whale's stench overwhelms the picnic crowd he realises that something has gone wrong:

Something even more potent than the Great Pal had interposed its ugly self and plucked the prize from the palm of his hand. Until now he had had no cause for disappointment. On the contrary, his subconscious was congratulating itself on the progress he had made (his conscious self having, of course, no time to dwell on anything that was not on the highest level of humility and leadership). (p.119)

This split between the conscious and the sub-conscious, between mask and reality, between humility and the spiritual pride that underlies it proves to be nearly fatal for Mr. Pye. The dead whale itself is emblematic of the lower side of human nature, the "rag-and-bone shop," that Mr. Pye has sought to transcend with his vision of the island as "a living entity, a cosmos of healthy and far-reaching love" (p.58): "From the summit of metaphysics and the essence of love they had all of a sudden been woken to the beastliness of physical decay. The little dead whale must have been dead for a long, long time" (p.120).

The wings that bud from Mr. Pye's shoulders thus serve a dual function -- on the one hand they point to Pye's angelic qualities; on the other they mock his lack of human qualities, and lead him on the painful path of self-discovery. In the words of Irving Massey, "[m]etamorphosis is typically violent and flies in the face of reason. It does not lend itself to assimilation into pleasurable or consoling

schemes. . . . We get to know ourselves only through knowing that which is not ourselves; we must become alien to ourselves in order to be anything at all." ⁷⁴ Appropriately, it is the mirror, so often used as a metaphor for the search for identity, which reveals the wings to Mr. Pye.

Mr. Pye's belief in the oneness of all things is thus put to the test through metamorphosis and he realises how much he had depended on the difference of all things, "the rational world, the world whose natural and physical laws he had always taken for granted" (p.135), how much the irrationality of beauty and religious inspiration depends on a rational base and how, if the cable is cut, "then it would be of little use for him to follow his evangelical star, for chaos would yawn at him at every turning and his star might itself fall suddenly down the sky and become (why not?) a catfish, as it fell" (p.136). To recognise the importance of an ineluctable physical world leads to the recognition of the reality of one's own physical nature, one's mortality, one's imperfection. The bubble of Mr. Pye's spiritual complacency is burst and, for the first time, he experiences ordinary human doubt: "How strange it was that, unfledged, he had been at the height of his messianic powers, but that now, in the early glory of his plumage, he should hesitate and question the very roots of his faith" (p.137). His presumptuous relationship with the Great Pal ("He and I are on the best of terms. We understand one another." p.59), that had excluded the rest of humanity ("The whole world is unbalanced. There are a few of us, a very few, who fight to keep upright." p.100) and an insulation from the ordinary suffering of that humanity ("Mr. Pye had never been ill. . . . He did not really believe in pain, but was full of compassion for those who imagined themselves to be suffering." p.126) now gives way to a process of self-searching that ends in the realisation of his overweening spiritual pride.

Believing that the wings are an indication that he has been "too good for this world" (p.145), and longing now to be a part of this world, Pye determines to restore the balance by cultivating evil. Petty misdemeanours (pulling tongues at Tanty and Dredger) develop into a taste for evil when he starts practising witchcraft. He also makes secret nightly excursions to a goat tethered in Dixcart Valley: ". . . when he left the valley an hour after his face was as white as

tallow and his eyes glittered with a peculiar light. . . . It was no longer difficult for him to sin" (pp.177-179). When Pye tells Dredger that he stands "upon hell's border" (p.167), it might be truer to say that he stands upon heaven's threshold, for he is, through confrontation with his shadow, travelling the path into a full recognition of the duality of human nature. When he loses his wings and grows horns, the essential truth of his situation breaks upon him, "for beneath the gay patter and the iridescent surface and the bubble of immediacy, was the inexorable movement of primal darkness" (p.183). The lesson of the wings has not been enough. Even then he adopts a condescending attitude to the islanders, telling them the defensive lie that his misdemeanours were his conscious attempts to become human, rather than admitting that they were simply a way of getting rid of the wings:

'You were not quite truthful, were you, chief?'
 'What is that, my dear?'
 'You said your strange behaviour was because you wanted people to know that you had plumbed the depths. It wasn't that really. It was the wings, wasn't it?' (p.202)

The horns however, are another matter, "for it is one thing to find yourself on the road to paradise, however embarrassing, and another to find yourself heading for hell" (p.205). What ensues is the struggle to keep the wings and the horns in bearable tension: "Was he to spend the rest of his life in trying to balance his morals, to balance them in so exact a way that neither the wings nor the horns could find a way out?" (p.205). His sense of aloneness is excruciating as he goes about doing good to restore the balance:

He had not spared himself -- but now as he lay meditating he knew that there was more that he could do. He had not touched the fringe of self-denial. It was not enough to be good or even saintly. He must be hurt and humbled. He must so strengthen the fibres of his will that he could bear to abase himself and shed the last sweet foible of his pride. Pride; was that it? Had his life been built upon vanity? Was that why the Great Pal had mocked him with wings? Was that why the powers of darkness had taken him to themselves, and furnished him with their foul insignia? (p.210)

His final act of surrender and humility is to present himself, horns exposed, at the cattle fair, to be hissed and laughed at and finally chased across the island to the Coupée where he had his first vision of redeeming the island, only to find that it is his own redemption which awaits him, as his horns finally disappear and the wings expand gloriously, now as a token of his state of grace:

He knew that it did not really matter now whether he had horns or wings or scales or a dragon's tail -- something had come to him, a rare knowledge that blotted out his own particular heart and left him fearless of all save that he might fail to love the great Fountain-head, not as a child loves his father but as a father loves his child. (p.212)

He learns to love with the maturity, courage and wisdom that follows the terror of loneliness, helplessness and self-satisfied ignorance. Abstract theories about the irrationality of beauty and religion have become painfully learned truths, learned through humbling himself and acknowledging his dependence on the fixed, the rational and the limited, so that he might transcend these barriers and find the meaning of Nonsense that leads to salvation. Mr. Pye assures us that rationality and Nonsense are interrelated at a profound level; it assures us that the rainbow of imaginative or spiritual vision is an arch linking heaven and earth; it assures us that it is only through moving beyond a recognition of the whale to a recognition of the truth of unreason that faith is achieved. Chesterton has written:

It is significant that in the greatest religious poem existent, the Book of Job, the argument which convinces the infidel is not (as has been represented by the merely rational religionism of the eighteenth century) a picture of the ordered beneficence of the Creation; but, on the contrary, a picture of the huge and undecipherable unreason of it. 'Hast thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is?' This simple sense of wonder at the shapes of things, and at their exuberant independence of our intellectual standards and our trivial definitions, is the basis of spirituality as it is the basis of nonsense. Nonsense and faith (strange as the conjunction may seem) are the two supreme symbolic assertions of the truth that to draw out the soul of things with a syllogism is as impossible as to draw out Leviathan with a hook. The well-meaning person who, by merely studying the logical side of things, has

decided that 'faith is nonsense,' does not know how truly he speaks; later it may come back to him in the form that nonsense is faith.⁷⁵

Mr. Pye has been "through hell to Harley Street" (p.248) and back again and the final vision of the little man brings together the variety of tone in the novel:

It was a never-to-be-forgotten sight. There was beauty in it, with those ample wings of dazzling whiteness that bore him to and fro as he tried to learn how best to manage them: and there was pathos -- for he looked so solitary -- adrift in the hollow air. And there was bathos also, for it seemed incongruous to see his city trousers and his small, black, gleaming shoes. (p.254)

It seems right that Pye's escape should be aided by Tintagieu, whose dislike for his earlier smugness changes to affection and compassion for him in his isolation and suffering. He learns to love individuals: when Tanty asks if he has a last message for Dredger, he replies, "I don't know what to give her -- except my love" (p.249). He learns to love the Great Pal in all trust and humility, and, through the learning of these two kinds of love, he has come much closer to the earthy warmth and spontaneity of Tanty ("To talk with Tintagieu was to experience childhood all over again." p.110). Pye once suggested a peculiar trinity to Tanty after the picnic fiasco: "It is a tremendous night. You, and the whale, and me" (p.124). Now this fanciful idea has become a reality.

An imposter at the beginning of the novel, Pye becomes the scape-goat of the community at the end of the novel, and the game of hide-and-seek organized by Tanty is dubbed "Catch a Pye-Goat" (p.241). In this way, Pye is curiously like Steerpike, and has affinities with aspects of Northrop Frye's alazon, "someone who pretends or tries to be something more than he is" and the pharmakos who "is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society."⁷⁶ The island residents are now the ones who refuse to confront the grotesque, the "ambivalently abnormal," in Mr. Pye, the metaphor of the duality within themselves.⁷⁷ Instead, they chase Pye out of their lives in a passage suggesting its mythic analogies:

They were chasing the apparition like a horde in a dream. They had no option but to pursue. . . . It was no longer revenge, or fear, or hate -- it was dementia. Amazing, silent, serene, and winged -- Mr. Pye, at the plunging spearhead of madness, was a mere ten yards ahead of the fastest of his pursuers. He sat perfectly upright, yet perfectly relaxed while the great hoofs thundered below him. As the ground began to dip he drew forth his soul and tossed it skywards to his God. (pp.252-253)

One may recall, here, the final scene of Vittorio de Sica's Miracle in Milan where the "failures of the earth" who are also its scape-goats finally escape to a better world, this time by means of broomsticks which float over the towers of Milan, led by the holy fool Toto.⁷⁸ Pye, indeed, sees his greatest glory in his acknowledgment of failure: "Success is finite, but failure is infinite. It is all rather wonderful, really," he tells his friends (p.235). And one thinks of another failure, the priest in Luis Buñuel's film, Nazarin. The priest finally accepts his humanity in acknowledging both his failure and the human gift of the pineapple, and on the soundtrack we hear the drums of Calanda, of the Easter ritual, build up in accompaniment to his saddened steps.⁷⁹ The latter is the realistic ending, the ending of Thorpe, the painter, who has to live with the frustration of knowing that his painting will never re-create reality as he wishes it to:

He knelt down on the wet sand and spread out his sketch-book. He must make marks, coloured marks, any marks, that might convey at least a fragment of the scene; the gloating light; the rhythm of the rocks.

But no. It was no use. It was the moon itself that balked him. The moon, that fatuous circle. That overrated face that spawned the light; and it wasn't even her own light.

The whole thing stank of false romanticism. It reeked of a million postcards. It was a racket. (p.92)

The twentieth century artist has to deal not only with the loss of sympathy with the natural world, but with the commercialism that has cheapened that world. When Thorpe does have a vision of the island that might be translated into art, he is, with cruel incongruity, brought down in the midst of his ecstasy:

A kind of exultation filled him, something he had not

experienced for years, and he jumped to his feet and began to run. He had seen something in his mind's eye, a picture, dynamic, vital, savage, frozen into geometry, its surface hoary with dragged paint, a painting unlike any other painting. . . . he ran on and on in the moonlight.

At the very moment when a stitch in his side screamed out for him to halt, he found himself soaring through the air, and the next moment he was lying on his face in a rock pool. (p.93)

It is appropriate that, a few pages later, Mr. Pye's dream of transforming the island should be ridiculed by the smell of the whale. The conflict between the dream and the reality can also be debilitating. Next to Tanty, "the painter looked like . . . something pale, shadowy, a man in search of a personality" (p.69). In Tintagieu and in Pye, at the end of the novel at least, there is no conflict. They are content to accept the reality of themselves, she in her fullness, he in his limitation. For the artist (and Thorpe is very like a comic portrait of Peake himself), life is a continuing struggle as he tries to harmonize the world. Thorpe's failure as an artist is partly attributable to his failure to cope with the reality from which Goya and Bosch drew their inspiration. As Pye says, when Thorpe faints at the sight of the horns, "He can gulp down Goya by the quart and wallow in Heronumus. I've seen him at it. But when it comes to my poor little effort, what does he do? -- he collapses like a rotten floorboard" (pp.224-225).

Not only does the artist have to face up to that reality, he also has to work in a world of frightening moral ambiguity, always aware that Miss Dredger simplifies when she says that "goodness is goodness and evil is evil" (p.62), and so does Mr. Pye when, before his horns and wings teach him differently, he tells of how he rejected "the land of half-measures" (p.129) for the unequivocal good. The experience that follows suggests that the unequivocal good can only be known after one has covered the full range of human joy and suffering.

The belief in the need to "drink / Life to the lees"⁸⁰ is very close to the spirit of Romanticism, especially as expressed by poets such as Baudelaire. Peake shares with the French poet an awareness of the struggle between heaven and hell, and a fascination for the diabolical, the forbidden, the goat in Dixcart Valley. Baudelaire described this

war between two worlds as follows:

Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations
simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan.
L'invocation vers Dieu ou spiritualité est un désir de
monter en grade; celle de Satan ou animalité est une
joie de descendre. 81

Les Fleurs du Mal opens with the famous poem "Au Lecteur," where
Baudelaire emphasises the darker side of man's desires: 82

C'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent!
Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons des appas;
Chaque jour vers l'Enfer nous descendons d'un pas,
Sans horreur, à travers des ténèbres qui puent. (11.13-16)

The Romantic sense of Satan's power is related to the sense of his
heroic stature and the ambivalent response to his evil. All this is
central to Peake's poem, "Satan":

Sickened by virtue he rebelled and cried
For all things horrible to be his bride

For through the hot red tides of sin move such
Fish as lose radiance at virtue's touch.

Should he reform and vomit up his evil?
It would not only be that his spiked devil
Would be dethroned, but also, amid groans
Those swarming hues that make his joints their homes. (p.26)

Here, we see Slaughterboard's fascination with the purple sea, "the
colour of a bruise" as well as the Romantic reinterpretation of
Satan as a lonely, passionate and agonized anti-hero. Satan becomes
the diabolical but tortured artist, full of pride, ambition ("his
spiked devil / Would be dethroned") and desire for the "swarming
hues," whose power is both sexual and aesthetic (they would leave
"amid groans"), suggesting that there is a kind of vital creativity
uniquely available to the powers of darkness. Out of Satan's agony
is born a "fearful symmetry," a "terrible beauty," like that of
Blake's awesome Tiger. 83

Peake's concern to challenge the perspective of the bowler hat
and the black umbrella thus places him in the tradition of the

Romantic revolt against Classical standards of beauty, truth and goodness. The Classical equation has to be usurped. In the reaction, Hogarth's Caliban is the pathetic, tortured outcast, Hugo's Quasimodo is the hero of the tale, George MacDonald's beautiful Alder has a coffin for a back, and the hideous dwarf in Buñuel's Nazarin is the only fully sympathetic character in the film.⁸⁴ Mario Praz's exhaustive study of The Romantic Agony demonstrates the love-hate relationship with Medusa's head and the "Divine Marquis" that prevailed during the nineteenth century.⁸⁵

The impossibility of making easy generalizations about beauty is explored by Peake in a macabre short story called Same Time, Same Place.⁸⁶ The narrator, a young man of twenty-three, tells of his frustration at living at home with his nagging, poverty-stricken parents. He leaves for "the never-never land" (p.144), Piccadilly, on a bus "to death or glory" (p.144). In a Corner House, he meets a beautiful woman, they fall in love and, after several meetings, agree to marry. It strikes him as peculiar that he can never feel her foot beneath the table and she never leaves before him. On the way to the court for the wedding, he discovers why. From the bus window he sees into the registry office and beholds a bearded lady and three men, one with "the longest neck on earth" (p.149), one with a tattooed head and one with a goat's cloven hoof in place of a hand. Something enters the room, "something in white" (p.149) that looks like a dog or a mechanical doll and it is lifted onto a chair. It is the beloved, her long dress now draped around the chair to hide her dwarfishness. In horror the young man returns home: "Since then I have never left the house. I know what is best for me" (p.150).

It is a skilfully told story, building up suspense with the clues concerning the dwarf and establishing a disturbing tension between the ordinary shabby world of the home, the sham glitter of the city and the frustrated lover. His similarity to Titus is seen in his dissatisfaction with his home: "I would go away; I would shake off the dark smug mortality of the place. I would forgo my birthright" (p.143). Like Titus, he reveals the need to explore, to assert his own identity, to find glamour and adventure: "The bus fled on like a fabulous beast, bearing me with it to a magic land" (p.148). Piccadilly, however, becomes a circus in an unexpected way. From the cloistered nature of home, he ventures into the world of love and

romance, only to be sorely disillusioned and so regresses to his original state, a happy return to the womb. The need to escape the mother leads to the return to the mother as a result of confrontation with the deformed goddess of love.⁸⁷ The outside world is frightening and alien; it is easier to sink into "smug mortality." The criticism levelled at the narrator is implicit in the smug concluding line. He knows, not "what is best" for him, but what is safest for him. He is clearly incapable of coping with the freak and the alien, the strangeness of the world "out there." The creative spirit reaching out is swamped by the fear of its own vulnerability. Mother's milk is easier on the palate than the dangerous beverage offered by Piccadilly's Corner House.

The conflict between destructive and creative impulses is at the heart of another short story, Danse Macabre, where the narrator turns out to be dead.⁸⁸ His tale is one, again, of frustrated love, or, as he puts it in the Poe-like rhetoric of the opening paragraphs, "ill-omen'd" love (p.134). This time, however, the narrator confesses to his culpability in the break-up of his marriage. He speaks of "a strengthening of that perverse and hideous thing that drives men to their own destruction, the more the love, the more the wish to hurt" (p.140). The danse macabre that takes place every night in the wood is that of her ice-blue dress with his dinner suit. He admits to the ludicrous quality of the vision, but he cannot smile, for clearly the clothes know better than the owners. When he and his wife meet again in these clothes, they try to struggle against the will of the garments, but are left dead, while the clothes dance. The disjunction between the "I" who tells the story and the dead body is an effective narrative device for conveying the idea of a character torn apart by warring impulses. The consciousness of goodness and love is vested in the clothes, while the torturing consciousness of guilt and destructiveness remains with the disembodied spirit.

The common concern of Mr. Slaughterboard, Mr. Pye, Same Time, Same Place, Danse Macabre and the poem "Satan" is the "crazy balance" of life, the need to reconcile a variety of opposites, and to see their fundamental interrelationship: the beautiful and the grotesque, the good and the evil, the creative and the destructive. In his poems dealing with the Second World War, Mervyn Peake confronts the problems of conflict as directly experienced in a world which itself seems

to have become a freak show floating through space.

The Poetry of Disenchantment

The French filmmaker, Jean Renoir, introducing his masterpiece, La Grande Illusion, made an interesting, if controversial comment on the difference between the two World Wars:

The story of La Grande Illusion is absolutely true and was told to me by some of my comrades in the war. . . I am obviously referring to the war of 1914. In 1914, Hitler had not yet appeared. Nor had the Nazis, who almost succeeded in making people forget that the Germans are also human beings. In 1914, men's spirits had not yet been warped by totalitarian religions and racism. In certain ways, that world war was still a war of formal people, of educated people -- I would almost dare say, a gentlemen's war. That does not excuse it. Politeness, even chivalry, does not excuse massacre. 89

Peake's war poems leave one in no doubt that the horrific savagery and holocaustic dimensions of the Second World War affected him most profoundly. In these poems, he examines the effects of war in terms of the city, the natural world, the Christian religion, and in terms of his own position as an artist.

The city becomes a moving image of war's destruction in "London 1941" (p.27). In this poem, the city is seen as a woman whose body disintegrates under the attack. The date is evocative and establishes the context in which to read the poem, but the image is nevertheless a universal one -- "Half masonry, half pain" (l.1). Peake's sensitivity to the personality of architecture, man's creation, is evident here and the building becomes the feminine bearer of pain inflicted by men's other creations -- bombs and missiles. The poem is structured by means of a catalogue of the physical atrocities perpetrated on the building, which then becomes an image for the human suffering caused by the war. Through the ruin of the building we are constantly directed to the destruction of the people:

her eyes
 Are lid-less windows of smashed glass,
 Each star-shaped pupil
 Giving upon a vault so vast
 How can the head contain it? (11.4-8)

The emptiness and dereliction of the building are also the dereliction of the mind of man who can never grasp the full impact of what he has done. War as a perversion of nature is, paradoxically, an extension of the building or city as a perversion of nature, for there is only "the grass of cities" (l.20), and the "ghosted leaf and lily" of wallpaper (l.19). Nevertheless, the building is here sustained as a sympathetic image of human creativity and suffering:

Her breasts are crumbling brick where the black ivy
 Had clung like a fantastic child for succour (1115-16)

A more direct articulation of the conflict between war and nature is seen in "May 1940" (p.28) and "Fort Darland" (p.29). In the former, the traditional association of festal rebirth with spring and the "merry month of May" has been destroyed by "darkened hours." Man's erstwhile oneness with his environment, "when the thought was single" and the cycle of birth, growth, decay, death, and rebirth provided the comfort of merging with the seasonal change, has been disrupted; for man has been made in God's image, he has been given powers of reason which he cannot control and channel into creativity. The duality of human nature has led to insanity, the separation of man from the soil, man from man, and man from himself.

If not within the slow limbs of that oak tree,
 If not within the uplands or the furrow,
 Where has lost sanity a resting place
 These days. For she has left these habitations
 Built in God's image.

This last line is a challenge to the Romantic notion that "God made the country, and man made the town." Here, both God and man, by their powers of reason, by their self-consciousness are separate from the "proud, slow trees" and from "all things / That grow in silence."

The dehumanizing violation of the noise of war, with its grotesque machinery, is again compared, in "Fort Darland," with the

onetime reality of "men who move with silent feet / And droop their thoughtful heads to earth." The tone of disbelief that such could still exist results from the personal frustration of having one's limbs, created in the living womb of the mother, moulded "to the square machine of war." With the natural body imprisoned, the imagination is the only means of escape back to nature:

I shall not move but shall defy my body
By dreaming of pale gods that laze in ether.

There is, thus, a dual attitude to the powers of the human mind -- on the one hand it separates man from nature; on the other, it is the means by which he can escape the situation it has created.⁹⁰

The possibilities for escape through dreams are counterpointed by the possibilities for spiritual rebirth out of the war. This is suggested in The Rhyme of the Flying Bomb.⁹¹ It is one of the most positive and moving responses to the war. A ballad with a rollicking rhythm, it tells of how a sailor saves a baby and seeks shelter in a church in the middle of a bomb attack. The baby, magically, talks to the sailor and they share their joy to be alive, when the flying bomb hits the church. The sense of the time being out of joint is conveyed in the first stanza:

A babe was born in the reign of George
To a singular birth-bed song,
Its boisterous tune was off the beat
And all of its words were wrong; (11.1-4)

There follows a vibrant, expressionistic account of the war-torn city, countered by the hope of rebirth when the sailor who has no faith is told by the baby that he has shown love, "The greatest of the three" (1.296). The combination of violence and spiritual transcendence which marks this response to war clearly links the poem with the expressionist response to the First World War. R.S. Furness describes this movement in terms of its concern with "[t]he soul under stress, racked and burning in fearful incandescence."⁹² In Peake's poem, the burning and the incandescence are conveyed through the hectic colours of the verbal descriptions and through the jagged passion of the illustrations, with their fragments and

abstracts, "vital, savage, frozen into geometry," the image that Thorpe longed to create:

And the church leapt out of a lake of light
 And the pews were rows of fire
 And the golden cock crowed thrice and flew
 From the peak of the falling spire.

And the candlewax swam over the stones,
 And the tail of the flying Bomb
 Stuck out of the floor to point the place
 That it had journeyed from. (11.469-476)

The bomb becomes, as John Batchelor has pointed out, an image of the Cross, while the baby's blood is Christ's, and as it covers the dying sailor it marks his first sacrament.⁹³

Opposed to this vision, is that of war as a profanation of religious meaning. This is emphasized in two poems that make use of biblical and apocalyptic imagery: "The Spadesmen" (p.30) and "Thunder the Christ of it" (p.31). Images of death predominate in the former poem, and the metaphor of the crucifixion is sustained. The spadesmen themselves are no more than anonymous tools, the plural noun indicating the facelessness of the grave-diggers, with their spades, the symbol of death in the pack of cards. The victims are reduced to dismembered objects -- limbs, throats and ribs, that are "singing" with hideous irony, as the catalogue of props needed for the horrifying scene is presented. Calvary is transferred to a twentieth century idiom of materialism and commercial greed. This is a mass-produced crucifixion, a parody of a Los Angeles funeral, all gleam and gloss, a travesty of the true Golgotha:

Now that each grave is scooped, each cross is varnished;
 The robes of purple from the factory
 Hang from the branches of gethsemane --
 The coffins gleam and all the brass is burnished.

They have supplied the judas and the flails:
 The ten-a-minute barbed-wire crown-of-thorns
 Are in construction and a million pawns
 Are ear-marked for the fever and the nails.

Whether the poem refers to the dying soldiers or the concentration camp victims, it becomes, like Calvary, an image for all the history

of man's inhumanity to man. Every victim becomes a martyr dying for the sins of the world.

"Thunder the Christ of it" is also a violent inversion of the crucifixion, implying that the world has rejected all that that gift of love stood for. "Christ" is used as an abstract noun and, as such, recalls the last lines of St. Matthew's Gospel (28v.19): "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations," "thunder the Christ of it," spread the "good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people," of spiritual freedom through Christ, which implies losing oneself to merge with something greater than oneself.⁹⁴ But freedom has come to mean the "me generation":⁹⁵ "The field is free: / To everyone his choice." This is the freedom that leads to existential excess and the rule of "Judas in yellow." "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" as not only the Bible, the Law, is burnt, but "bibles," all books, are destroyed.⁹⁶ Here, they represent the pinnacle of human culture, and to achieve this, restraint and self-sacrifice must necessarily have gone hand in hand with a lust for life in one of the great paradoxes. But "Christ is forgotten in a world of wit." The crucifixion, symbol of at-one-ment, of sacrifice and giving, is rejected in favour of wit, here suggesting the intellect without the spirit, which leads to violence, treachery and self-love at the expense of all else.

In "Victims" (p.31), the betrayal of the spirit again expresses itself in lovelessness. As in "The Spadesmen," the deaths of the victims are marked by impersonality. This is captured in a series of stark negatives and questions without answers, crying into the unresponsive silence:

There was no hush of love. No silence flowered
About them, and no bland, enormous petals
Opened with stillness. Where was lavender
Or gentle light? Where were the coverlets
Of quiet?

Once more the conventional funeral rituals that make such a fuss of the dead are ironically referred to. Uncared for when alive, these victims do not even receive the "bland" attention usually accorded the dead by a self-involved society that, ultimately, nurtures such deaths as these suffered by the victims of the poem. And over all

presides the supremely impersonal form of history, "that witless chronicler," that product of time, not eternity, against which man struggles, no longer a part of an integrated mythic apprehension of the universe. History is abstract, disinterested. The victims become just one more event, one more statistic. The violent contrast of images is particularly effective in this poem: the horror of bleeding claws and blackened bodies is painfully present, while white pillows, lavender and gentle light are conspicuous by their absence.

The artist's eye for visual detail is something that gnaws at Peake's sensitivity as a man in "The Consumptive. Belsen 1945" (p.32):

If seeing her an hour before her last
Weak cough into all blackness I could yet
Be held by chalk-white walls, and by the great
Ash-coloured bed,
And the pillows hardly creased
By the tapping of her little cough-jerked head --
If such can be a painter's ecstasy,
(Her limbs like pipes, her head a china skull)
Then where is mercy?
And what
Is this my traffic? (11.1-11)

There is an ironic parallel between the brutalizing of war and the brutalizing of art, be it painting or poetry (there is a certain irony in the writing of this poem).

An equally personal statement of Peake's sense of alienation from all that the war exposed is found in "Is there no Love can Link Us" (p.34):

Is there no thread to bind us -- I and he
Who is dying now, this instant as I write
And may be cold before this line's complete?

Peake attempts, in this poem, to use those "threads" that "remain," those linking images of his art to freeze a moment of time, to articulate some relationship, some feeling of fraternity. The desperate questions accumulate as the perversion of life and nature continues around him -- there is the child "whose blackening skin / Blossoms with hideous roses in the smoke," there is the woman "Across whose body the loud roof is falling." The deeply distressing answer to the

questions is that no love can link the poet to man, woman or child for they are separate in their pain, a separation captured by the isolated images of the first three stanzas. Love must yield to "this desperate edge of now," to time passing as the only factor that men and women have in common. Again, we see the importance for Peake of the moment that "rages endlessly," to which one tries frantically to cling. Where love is unitive, the sharing and merging of separate selves, time means fragmentation, discrete moments that pass never to be recaptured. Man has lost touch with the sense of eternity as he has with the natural cycle. Instead of "the still point of the turning world" he finds only "this desperate edge of now." 97

It is in this "now" of time that the poet realizes that "The Time has Come for more than Small Decisions" (p.34). The opening line brings to mind Prufrock's reassuring

There will be time, there will be time . . .

Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions . 98

Now there is no more time, the apocalypse is now, the poet is forced into a confrontation with the urgency of this moment. Like Donne, like Shakespeare's Brutus, he sees himself at war:

I have my battleground no less than nations:
I have great traitors in the populous clay:
I am, no less than Albion, at war --
For while she struggles I must force my way
Into a land where sharper outlines are.

The poet's conflict is a moral one, forced into a new intensity by the war that rages outside him. His plea is for moral certainty, rather than the frustratingly ambiguous moral categories with which he is confronted. As an artist in the midst of war he feels rootless and cries for a straightforward set of codes to which he may submit himself, as Donne wishes to submit himself to the "three-personed God": 99

I am ill at ease
With propaganda glory, and the lies
Of statesmen and the lords of slippery trades.

The glib rationalizations (that Brutus eventually yields to) are the dangers to be avoided here and the simple, unrhetorical truth of man's bravery should emerge untainted by false patriotism, "More so when valour is unnatural." The final plea is for "An angry line dividing this from that" as Peake struggles for a coherent vision of the world at war.

The image of the self as a town suffering insurrection is central to and skilfully controlled in a short poem concerned with the breakdown of the poet's sanity:

As a great town draws the eccentrics in,
So I am like a city built of clay
Where madmen flourish, for beneath my skin,
In every secret arch or alleyway

That winds about my bones of midnight, they
Lurk in their rags, impatient for the call
To muster at my breastbone, and to cry
For revolution through the capital. (p.35)

The imperative need to exert artistic control over a world falling apart is evident in this tightly structured poem, an attempt to submit incipient madness to that control. The madmen who threaten revolution through the mind of the poet, "through the capital" are an indication of the fragmentation of identity that comes with the collapse of a world. In the poem, the mind is seen as a city, reminiscent of Gormenghast, the Under-River or the London of London Fantasy. The disintegration of the fantastic world, its failure to make sense of the real world, threatens madness.

This theme reappears in "At Times of Half-light" and "No Difference" (pp.35,36). The chiaroscuro world of the former poem, filled with ragged, bruised and forsaken monsters, is also the world of the outcasts of Peake's novels. "And in each brow a ruby like a wound." It is Fuchsia's ruby, a symbol of all the colour and beauty of life, but it is also the mark of Cain and the Wandering Jew.¹⁰⁰ The fantasy that has fed Peake's imagination and his desire for artistic expression is also the fantasy that threatens to destroy both his mind and his imagination. The creator becomes his creation, Peake plays with madness and goes mad, Jekyll dies as Hyde, Frankenstein dies as unfriended and vengeful as his monster.

In "No Difference" the problem of "the sliding second" is solved, but only through the annihilation of a consciousness of time, as the poet finds himself adrift in an alien world where "The streets of midnight wander through the Skull": 101

And there's no movement but the gusty cycle
Of calendars that tear dark leaves away.

The cycle, instead of ensuring the alternation of death and life, becomes a process of continual dying, winding down, and time has lost all meaning. There is no "desperate edge of now," for all nows are one and indivisible and shrouded in impenetrable shadow, in the most devastating equation, the equation of the void: "For time is darkness now, halted and null."

This darkness is most passionately and movingly evoked in "Heads Float About Me" (p.36), where the terror of the loss of the self is conveyed in the images of nightmare:

Heads float about me; come and go, absorb me;
Terrify me that they deny the nightmare
That they should be, defy me, . . .

The repetition of "me" in the first three lines emphasises the vain attempt to assert an individual identity that is threatened by the heads which refuse to be part of a nightmare from which the poet will awaken. Instead, they assert the reality of their existence -- they are real, he is awake. The horrifying implication is that reality is composed of these disembodied heads; reality is a nightmare; reality is madness. The internal rhyme in line three ("be" and "me") stresses the fear that an integrated sense of self is being challenged. As the rhyme is condensed in one line, so the poet's feeling of entrapment is suggested. His helplessness is also conveyed by the awareness of "secrecy" -- he is in a world unknown to others, kept from sight, shameful and unnatural by the standards of the outside world. Yet, in this secret world he discovers

the horror
Of truth, of this intrinsic truth
Drifting, ah God, along the corridors
Of the world. . . .

Like Kurtz, in Conrad's Heart of Darkness, the poet, removed beyond the pale of accepted society discovers a terrible truth, that the madness around him is an image of the madness of human life, extending "along the corridors / Of the world." The parenthetical call to God is painfully ironic in this context, for where is the God of light and harmony in this world of darkness and chaos? Shut away by the "clang" of the metal and the "rolling wheels," the madmen represent the dark underside of the rational world that must be hidden away. The last two lines reveal the final horror of isolation within walls that impose community, an image of the urban atomization that is so much a part of the world outside.

What this madness means for the artist is that the source of his fecund creativity has dried up. This is expressed in "Coarse as the Sun is Blatant" (p.37). The brilliant colours of nature appear odious and mocking. The poet wishes to be cut off from "other lands, / From other countries, other fields," and rejects the world of fantastic adventure. There is a disturbing sense of the real merging into the nothing, a void which the imagination finds itself unable to fill:

self pity like a curse
Turns all I see to ugliness: the lawns
A wilderness for lack of unicorns fades
The elm a tower for birds of paradise.

Of course, there is an ironic optimism for, in spite of the failure of the romantic world, the poem does exist. The paradox, that out of agony may come life and creation, is explored in Peake's tribute to El Greco (p.37).

Written as a sonnet, this poem draws attention to itself as a formal ordering of experience, the ~~ex~~perience of a painting. The octave attempts to translate the painting and the poet's response into verbal images which reveal a tension between motion and stasis, between sound and silence, passion and ice: the etherial "tall saints" are "enswathed in a tempestuous flare, " "frozen draperies. . . twist through air," "dye incredible" is contrasted to the heads which are "Pale upon coiling cloud in regions rare." Beauty is both "ice-like" and "shrills" and music is "metal." The fluidity and fixity of art are presented as being in an eternal tension (as in Keats's Grecian urn),

as aspiration ("They spire terrific bodies into heaven") and reality (the heads are "brittle carved") pull against each other.

In the sestet, the artistic tension is made explicit. The artist is seen as Christ, and, as Christ suffered the physical and spiritual agony of the nails in order to give the blood of life, so the artist, out of his pain, impales the canvas with the image of that pain, giving life to the canvas. As Christ takes on his shoulders the burdens of the world, so the artist responds to and expresses all the human experience which is his legacy:

So drives the acid nail of coloured pain
 Into our vulnerable wood earth-rooted,
 And sends the red sap racing through the trees
 Where slugged it lay -- now spun with visions looted
 From whining skies, and sharp Gethsemanés
 Of hollow light and all the wounds of Spain.

(There is some ambivalence in the word "looted," which seems to recall the poet's guilt in, for example, "The Consumptive," that out of pain he can make art. The art itself, then, becomes a contributing factor to his pain).

A strange poem called "An Ugly Crow Sits Hunched on Jackson's Heart" presents another perspective on the paradoxical relationship between death and creativity (p.38). The symbol of death opens his wings and becomes the gateway to the innocent paradise of childhood dreams:

sea-green pastures and golden towns
 And tents and children climbing to the sun
 And all the white and crimson of the clowns.

Jackson, however, has not learnt to communicate with this world in order to make it his own:

But Jackson knows no secret way to turn
 His tongue into crow-language, nor to plead
 His right to pastures, tumblers, and gold towns. . . .

To find the language of one's heart, to rejoice again in the simple glowing images of childhood revealed by the spreading wings of the crow, to appreciate the gift of life, even if death hovers over it --

this is the yearning of the poet in both the above poem and in one which Maeve Gilmore used as a contrast to "Heads Float About Me": ¹⁰²

Out of the overlapping
 Leaves of my brain came tapping
 Tapping. . . a voice that is not mine alone:
 Nor can the woodpecker
 Claim it as his own: the flicker
 Deep in the foliage belongs to neither
 Birds, men or dreams.

It is as far away as childhood seems. (p.38)

It is interesting to note that, here, the city image has been replaced by a natural one, while the inner voice, like the tintinnabulum, promises gentle joys rather than violent disintegration. Peake's widow suggests that this poem indicates his willingness to move beyond the mute horror of madness to a creative exploration of that state itself. R.D.Laing contends that the experience of madness can be a constructive one if seen in terms of a journey deep into the self, and a return out of that deep centre with a knowledge of the mysteries of being unavailable to the sane, "a beauty / most proud and terrible / denied to those whose duty / is to be cerebral": "Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be break-through. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death." ¹⁰³

In the Titus books, the hero seems to experience a similar movement from enchantment, through a period of "crazy balance," to disenchantment and the promise of an "existential rebirth." It is this pattern which will be traced in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER TWO : TITUS GROAN "A WORLD SURROUNDED BY A WALL"

All flowers that die: all hopes that fade:
All birds that cease to cry:
All beds that vanish once they're made
To leave us high and dry --
All these and many more float past
Across the roofs of Gormenghast. 1

On December 28, 1939, the following letter was written to the War Office:

To whom it may concern

I wish to recommend Mr Mervyn Peake as a draughtsman of great distinction who might be most suitably employed in war records.

Augustus John 2

This letter failed to produce the hoped-for result and Mervyn Peake spent the next two-and-a half years moving around England, from Dartford to Blackpool, from Salisbury Plain to London, learning to be a gunner, a driving instructor, and an engineer -- without much success. The birth of his first two children during this time and the distance from his family contributed to the strain on one used to the freedom of a fairly bohemian life-style and 1942 saw him recovering from a nervous breakdown at Southport. While at Dartford in 1940, he had started writing a book, initially called "Goremen-ghast" and he was now encouraged to continue writing as a part of his therapy.³ Peake's other major creative activity during the war was book illustration, starting with Carroll's The Hunting of the Snark.⁴ In a radio talk after the war, Peake said: "This constant moving about gave me little scope for painting and I found myself continually packing my kitbag and away again -- with yet another canvas too wet to travel."⁵

In the same way that book illustration took the place of painting, Hugh Brogan sees Peake's first book as "a substitute for the drawings that Peake would have produced had the authorities been sensible enough to take Augustus John's advice and appoint him

an Official War Artist." ⁶

Thus, the relationship between drawing and writing, between verbal and visual expression became a focal point for Peake's creativity. In the words of Henry Tube, "the novels could not have been written by anyone but an artist, while the drawings are those of a man soaked in the text he is illustrating. This cross-fertilisation accounts at least partly for the unique quality of his best work in both fields." ⁷

Cross-fertilization does not, however, cease at this point. In Titus Groan Peake found that he was able to include all that interested him, all those aspects of his vision considered in the previous chapter of this dissertation: Nonsense characters and Nonsense verse, strange and enchanted visions, adventure, daydreams, revenge, and murder, creatures grotesque, evil and lovable, and the fascination for "a closed world, a secret society," that is unnervingly close to ours. ⁸ "I had no preconceived plan," said Peake, "I really wanted to make a kind of pantechnicon book, in which I could shove in any mental furniture, however horrible -- or however beautiful -- if I could do so." ⁹ A "pantechnicon book" is Peake's variation on the novel. As Edwin Morgan suggests:

A writer who is also an artist, with a strongly developed visual imagination and a distinct air for portraying the grotesque and the strange, tries his hand at the novel. He sees this literary form, this great tract so ill-defined in shape and purpose, apparently welcoming a lavish and indulgent play of imagination, a story-telling rich with fantastic incident, whose sole necessity is to enthrall. This is a freedom he will find deceptive, but only partly deceptive. He discovers that the "necessity to enthrall" involves him willy-nilly with human feelings and experiences, and that the novel is oddly tenacious of its verisimilitudes, even when it is shading off towards fairy-tale or allegory. If he can learn this lesson, humanize his fantasy, localize his strangeness -- he has the chance of proving how important the imagination is, in a form which is constantly being pushed towards documentation and naturalism. ¹⁰

Morgan concludes that Peake's fantastic world does indeed have a "basis in recognizable experience, highly particularized and circumstantial." ¹¹ The implication is that Peake's Gormenghast has, perhaps, more in common with the impulses behind Hardy's Wessex and

Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha than with Tolkien's Middle-earth or Lewis's Narnia. Hardy speaks of Wessex as "a partly real, partly dream-country,"¹² while Faulkner explained, in a famous interview:

Beginning with Sartoris I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and that by sublimating the actual into the apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. It opened up a gold mine of other people, so I created a cosmos of my own. I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too. 13

It is worth noting the similar enjoyment of power over one's creation expressed by Peake: "I enjoy the fantastic and the sheer excitement of having a piece of white paper and a pen in one's hand and no dictator on earth can say what word I put down. . . ." ¹⁴ No dictator except truth to one's vision of the world.

Hardy and Peake share an intensely visual imagination, the ability to condense the central concerns of the novel in powerfully suggestive tableaux and symbols, as well as a fine sense of the value of popular, traditional forms such as the ballad, melodrama, folk tale and fairy tale for controlling structure and for generating multiple levels of meaning. Faulkner and Peake share a sense of the oppression of the past and the effort required to come to terms with it, an effort often involving fear and guilt. The centrality of the misfit, the freak and the madman is also common to their work and both have been called gothic novelists.

Furthermore, it seems appropriate to call Titus Groan a novel (although the heightened quality of the action and the characterization, and the estranged world clearly relate it to the romance and the marvellous) for it does partake very noticeably of the features traditionally ascribed to the realistic novel. In The Rise of the Novel, Ian Watt points out that the novel is "distinguished from other genres and from previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords both to the individualization of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment. . . . It would appear, then, that the function of language is much more largely referential in the novel than in other literary forms; that

the genre itself works by exhaustive presentation rather than by elegant concentration." ¹⁵ Michael Irwin also stresses this point: "A major feat of the developed realistic novel was to make a character, a scene, an environment believable in a far ampler way, partly by providing more to believe in, partly through greater power and skill of presentation." ¹⁶

The point here is that Peake's intense awareness and detailed artist's observation of the variety and complexity of the real world around him, which serve as a basis for his poetry and minor prose, are equally the basis for the Titus books. Edmund Little, comparing Peake with Gogol, makes the point clearly:

Were Gormenghast and NN. totally exotic worlds filled with dragons, goblins or Balrogs, utterly remote from everyday experience, the reader might well dismiss them as figments of a gruesome dream and conveniently forget the offending shadows. Unfortunately the eeriness derives not from the introduction of people and objects alien to the Waking World. Both writers take familiar things and proceed to upset the relationships among them. ¹⁷

The comparison with Gogol draws Peake into the group of "fantastic realists," a term Rosemary Jackson uses to describe, among others, Dickens, Balzac, Dostoevsky and Hardy, novelists in whom she finds a disruption of the "main, realistic text" by "another non-realistic one, camouflaged and concealed, but constantly present," comprising gothic elements, sensationalism, melodrama, romance and fantasy. ¹⁸ Particularly in the novels of Dickens, one sees texts which "move towards a dialogical structure, questioning from within the normative assumptions of their 'realistic' frames. . . . His novels are riddled with contradictions in their use of the fantastic, on the one hand alienating the reader from a 'demonic' world which lies outside bourgeois reality, but on the other locating all energy and vitality within that under-world." ¹⁹

What appears to happen in Peake's novels is that Dickens's underworld becomes the main focus. The caricatures and grotesques who either people the sub-plots or play the villains in Dickens's London become the main characters in Peake's Gormenghast and the gothic, melodramatic and nightmarish elements, which suffer defeat at the end of a Dickens novel, rise to the surface and dominate. Thus, Dickens's

subversive questioning of "the normative assumptions" concerning the real becomes overt and fulfils the function of fantasy in an explicit way. Where the real world was once an objective entity "out there" that could be represented by means of words, the modern fantasist now reveals a self-conscious sense of his own role in creating "the real world," and a sense of the value of the fantastic as a mode for exploring his relationship with that world. In Northrop Frye's words, "[t]he secular scripture tells us that we are the creators; other scriptures tell us that we are actors in a drama of divine creation and redemption." ²⁰

In summarizing the structuralist approach to the real, Terence Hawkes writes that "[t]he true nature of things may be said to lie not in things themselves, but in the relationships which we construct, and then perceive, between them," and, elsewhere, suggests that the Romantic, and especially Coleridgean view of the metaphor derives from a similar perception. The metaphor is "Imagination in action;" it is "a way of experiencing the facts. It is a way of thinking and of living; an imaginative projection of the truth. As such, it is at the heart of the 'made'" and is central to defying accepted boundaries between the real and the unreal, and central to the creation of new unities. ²¹ Tzvetan Todorov sees the fantastic in similar terms, as "the quintessence of literature, insofar as the questioning of the limit between real and unreal, proper to all literature is its explicit centre." ²² This idea has been developed by Jackson: "Unlike the marvellous or the mimetic, the fantastic is a mode of writing which enters a dialogue with the 'real' and incorporates that dialogue as part of its essential structure." ²³

In its "dialogue with the 'real'" the fantastic is acutely conscious of the limits of language, that symbolic structure meant to help us constrain the complexity of the real within the bearable. Language is inadequate in dealing with the totality of the real. "Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break," wrote Eliot. ²⁴ Nevertheless, the awareness of such limitations creates a humility before the real and fantasy becomes the one way in which to attempt a restoration of that totality. Fantasy is unbound by realistic conventions of time, space and identity for it sees them as arbitrary and replaceable. J.B. Baronian expresses this liberating function as follows:

En somme, le fantastique est d'abord une idée, un simple concept que le récit littéraire module à sa guise, à l'infini. L'idée que notre monde, notre quotidien peut à tout moment être dérangé, transgressé, bouleversé de fond en comble, être perçu autrement que par la raison raisonnante, devenir un champ d'inconstance, d'aléa, de duplicité, d'équivoque, une chimère, le mouvement même de l'imaginaire. 25

He goes on to quote Irène Bessière who introduces the useful idea of the "obliterated real":

L'événement fantastique redessine la totalité que la culture oblitère, et par là se charge d'une fonction libératrice. Il ne correspond pas au passage de la frontière du réel, mais au surgissement de certains domaines du réel oblitérés. 26

This suggests that, to prevent culture from becoming a static, complacent and ultimately oppressive force, it should be constantly revealed as a construction that shields us from an obliterated and perhaps terrifying reality that is, nevertheless, there. Men with black umbrellas must be made to see Pegasus in Victoria Station.

In this sense, the fantastic is a means of confronting rather than escaping from the totality of the real world. In writing about Victorian fantasy, Stephen Prickett declares that fantasy has "created far other worlds and other seas. By them we have been able to hold a mirror to the darker and more mysterious sides of our own, and see reflected in a glass darkly mysteries not otherwise to be seen at all." 27 The connection with the function of dreams is clear. (Prickett also notes that Nonsense is the appropriate product of the Victorian era, "an alternative language for coping with the conditions of a world at once more complicated and more repressive. So far from being random. . . Nonsense constituted an entire alternative aesthetic, making possible a radically different kind of art." 28 Its continuing popularity argues its appropriateness to our age as well, allowing control over the expression of fears, guilt and obsessions).

Fantasy, then, can be seen as a self-conscious dialogue with the real, an attempt to liberate the "obliterated" aspects of the real and so confront them. It is, in many ways, related to the modes of romance and the marvellous. Todorov places the marvellous to one side of the fantastic as "the supernatural accepted," with the uncanny on

the other side as "the supernatural explained." The fantastic hesitates between acceptance and explanation of the supernatural.²⁹ Jackson objects to the category of the uncanny as a non-literary one and posits the idea of the fantastic partaking of the marvellous and the mimetic, using the former to subvert the latter:

Fantastic narratives confound elements of both the marvellous and the mimetic. They assert that what they are telling is real -- relying upon all the conventions of realistic fiction to do so -- and then they proceed to break that assumption of realism by introducing what -- within those terms -- is manifestly unreal. . . .Between the marvellous and the mimetic, borrowing the extravagance of one and the ordinariness of the other, the fantastic belongs to neither and is without their assumptions of confidence or presentations of authoritative 'truths'.³⁰

The marvellous usually implies Tolkien's Secondary World, with its own brand of conservatism, which runs the risk of becoming purely escapist, a compensation for a lack in the real world. On the other hand, it can serve fantasy in just as radical a way as Nonsense can. Todorov quotes Pierre Malville:

Beyond entertainment, beyond curiosity, beyond all the emotions such narratives and legends afford, beyond the need to divert, to forget, or to achieve delightful or terrifying sensations, the real goal of the marvellous journey is the total exploration of universal reality.³¹

Again, we are returned to our world. Similarly, for romance to be a valid form of expression, giving us structures and images by means of which we may respond creatively to our world, adding to it, instead of just commenting on it (to echo C.S.Lewis), it must bring us back.³² Richard Hurd put the emphasis on "other worlds": "A poet, they say, must follow Nature; and by Nature we are to suppose can only be meant the known and experienced course of affairs in this world. Whereas the poet has a world of his own, where experience has less to do, than consistent imagination."³³ Hawthorne, in his introduction to The House of the Seven Gables, qualified this liberty afforded the poet's world by stressing that romance "sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart."³⁴ Gillian Beer's definition is one of the most useful:

[Romance] frees us from our inhibitions and preoccupations by drawing us entirely into its own world -- a world which is never fully equivalent to our own although it must remind us of it if we are to understand it at all. . . . By removing the restraints of rationalism it can reach straight to those levels of our experience which are also re-created in myth and fairy-tale. By simplifying character the romance removes the idiosyncrasies which set other people apart from us; this allows us to act out through stylized figures the radical impulses of human experience. 35

Romance is thus linked to fairy tales. Bruno Bettelheim has examined these as a way of achieving knowledge of self and other.³⁶ There is also a clear link between romance and what Robert Scholes has termed fabulation. He describes it as a form of writing that "tends away from direct representation of the surface of reality but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy," and the fabulator is one who tries to "reach beyond reality to truth, beyond the immediate and contemporary to those aspects of the real which will endure and recur." 37

It is possible, therefore, for the writer who chooses fantasy as a mode of relating to his world, to include the terrifying and the wonderfully fair world of the marvellous, the romance, the fairy tale, folklore and Nonsense and still fulfil the need to enter into a dialogue with the world. None of these forms of expression is necessarily escapist (in the pejorative sense of uncreative self-indulgence). On the contrary, the formulas on which they depend, if intelligently and imaginatively used, provide a framework for the structuring of ways of seeing more clearly, more fully. Frye suggests that "[i]n the course of struggling with a world which is separate from itself, the imagination has to adapt its formulaic units to the demands of that world. . . ." 38 He goes on later to say: "Fiction in the last generation or so has turned increasingly from realism to fantasy, partly because fantasy is the normal technique for fiction writers who do not believe in permanence or continuity of the society they belong to." 39 The implication is that fantasy, like Nonsense, enables the liberation of new perspectives on a real world which the artist sees as shifting its outlines constantly (the importance of metamorphosis in fantastic literature may be noted here). This is clearly different from the traditional realist approach which sees the real world as complete and fixed. This is not

to imply that fantasy is structurally loose, however. Like Nonsense, fantasy makes use of formulas, be they of Gothic or allegorical romance, folklore or melodrama. John Cawelti has isolated four main functions of formulaic literature:

1. Formula stories affirm existing interests and attitudes by presenting an imaginary world that is aligned with these interests and attitudes.
2. Formulas resolve tensions and ambiguities resulting from the conflicting interests of different groups within the culture or from ambiguous attitudes toward particular values.
3. Formulas enable the audience to explore in fantasy the boundary between the permitted and the forbidden and to experience in a carefully controlled way the possibility of stepping across this boundary.
4. Finally, literary formulas assist in the process of assimilating changes in values to traditional imaginative constructs. 40

Peake's novels clearly make use of formulas and Cawelti's last point, particularly, raises the question of the personal impulse behind Titus Groan. It was suggested earlier in this chapter that Peake substituted book illustration and prose for painting and drawing for the War Office. There is, understandably, a similarity in his approach to the verbal and visual, a belief in the value of fantasy for both forms of expression. He speaks of drawing in much the same way as the above critics discuss verbal fantasy: "To draw is to make marks that are the equivalent of a discovery. It is the smashing of another window pane. A letting-in of the light." 41

During the war, the relationship between picture and word became central, and Peake's powerful visual imagination found a natural home in the fantastic novel where a feeling for wonder and richness of detail could act in harmony with the suggestiveness of language in a way not permitted by drawing. To choose to work with the fantastic implies, too, that Peake was making an attempt to come to terms, not only with creative expression itself, but with his war-torn existence, with the shattered world he saw around him. Thus, the fantastic becomes a way of exploring his identity as versatile artist, as well as his relationship as artist to the changing world. He exploits the democracy of the fantastic that can include many of the formulaic modes enumerated above to achieve some kind of order out of

the chaos, some distance from the horror that might lead to a clearer understanding of it.

Numerous critics have pointed to this relationship between Titus Groan and Peake's experience of the war. C.N. Manlove suggests that part of the novel's purpose was consolatory: "It is reasonable to deduce that the castle was in part an unconscious consolation and compensation for its author, that its character would not have been so static if Peake's life had not been so much in flux and uncertainty."⁴² John Batchelor argues against the idea that Peake is dealing with the war "as a public event, however cryptically." "On the contrary," he asserts, "it is his private life that seems to furnish the themes for Titus Groan; he had been dragged away from his home and from all that he loved, and Titus Groan can be seen in part as a private world created to replace the one he had lost."⁴³ David Punter suggests an alternative approach, stating that the novel "stands out, not least because it clearly has as its origin a partly traumatised attempt to deal with the war itself and with the issues of social organisation associated with it. . . ."⁴⁴ Harry Blamires has stressed that the Second World War, unlike its predecessor, "could neither be glorified nor evaded."⁴⁵

It is of interest to note that both Manlove and Batchelor are obliged to qualify their theories of compensation. Peake's life was always one of "flux and uncertainty." That was the condition of his refusal to live by the standards of materialistic bourgeois society. Moving house constantly, working on several projects at once and never experiencing financial security -- these were part of his life. Maeve Gilmore recalls that her husband often told her of Cézanne who, "after he had been painting a portrait over a period of years and was asked how he felt about it, replied, 'I am not displeased with the left elbow. '"⁴⁶ (It is a sad irony that Peake's health declined violently with his determination to make a financial success out of his doomed play, The Wit to Woo).

Titus Groan cannot be seen then simply as an escape from "flux and uncertainty," while the rigid control and often irrational practices of the army find a very interesting, satirical analogue in Gormenghast. Similarly, the bizarre and monstrous elements in the novel seem curious replacements for Maeve, Fabian and Sebastian, but are very convincing as displaced images of the most devastating

war man has yet perpetrated on himself.⁴⁷ Punter's suggestion seems to have much validity, and supports Peake's stress on the importance of seeing the world rather than running away from it, of trying to "assimilate changes in values to traditional imaginative constructs." Speaking of the book illustrator, Peake had the following to say:

. . . he must remember that it is out of the grist and throb of life itself as it stutters about him, in the great cities, in the wide fields, among the rich and the poor, the snobs, the thieves and the sycophants -- everywhere that he must go for his raw material. He must stare, stare, stare: and having stared and while staring he must draw, and draw, and draw. Not for the sake of illustrating some particular book, but to extend his experience by recording something that excites his eye and his imagination -- for the excitement of the chase; for the artist is, among other things, a kind of head-hunter, a stalker of the night and of the day -- he must be full of greed. And a country lane, a kitchen, a cocktail party or a city street may prove as startling, as revealing and as full of prey as are the virgin jungles of a lost continent to some intrepid wanderer of the world. 48

The adventurer analogy is appropriate for one who could recite Treasure Island by heart and whose favourite fictional structure was the quest, a structure that is as important to the Titus books as it is to the minor prose.

That Peake meant Titus, the questing hero, to be the central character in the books, rather than the castle, is made clear by the fact that volume nine of the manuscript contains a list of chapters headed by the title "Goremenghast. Part One. Background for Titus" and two volumes later we find that Peake has officially changed the name of the first book to Titus Groan.⁴⁹ It seems, in the light of this, to make more sense to speak of the Titus books rather than the Gormenghast trilogy, and Colin Greenland has protested that terminology is important for the appreciation of the pattern of growth central to the novels. Obliquely referring to his B.A. thesis entitled Titus Unbound, he has this to say when writing about Titus Alone:

. . . I still think it necessary to spend breath and ink on insisting that these books are not "the Gormenghast trilogy." The distinction is not academic but essential. A reader who makes Gormenghast their centre and circum-

ference cannot appreciate the Titus books because he is refusing to leave home. What he demands of Peake is more Gormenghast, though Gormenghast is the place of stagnation and living death, of the triumph of history over freedom, of ritual over desire. He is using Peake as escapist fiction, an alternative to life, not a comment upon and extension of it. 50

Greenland overstates his case. Peake's attitude towards Gormenghast is too ambivalent to dismiss it as a place of "stagnation and living death" and it does not seem to be history which triumphs over freedom, unless by history Greenland means, simply, the past. Nevertheless, the point is well taken.

By changing the title of the first book to Titus Groan, Peake keeps the hero in focus, despite the fact that the book presents an awe-inspiring and lushly detailed description of the Castle, which could easily lead to the feeling that the building is the central character. Told by the title page that we are about to read a book on Titus, we find ourselves reading about a castle and this is as it should be, for they are, at a complex and profound level, one and the same thing. Herman Servotte elaborates on this idea by using Lacan's application of Freud's theory of the dream-work to linguistic operations:

According to him the activity of condensation can be compared to the process which leads to a metaphor; in both cases two or more chains of signification meet in one "signifiant"; thus Gormenghast is at the crossroads of two chains, the one consisting of all the predicates and attributes referring to it as a castle, the other made up of all the predicates and attributes referring to it as a human being. 51

It is for Titus to grow into a full awareness of his identity with the castle. He has to learn a conscious response to his home, for the instinctive responses of Fuchsia, Gertrude, Sepulchra and Flay prove to be incomplete. Titus may be compared with Mr. Pye who grows to a consciousness of his identity with the duality of the human race as he "metaphorises." Thus, the Castle is central to Titus's experience but his experience is central to the progress of the novels.

To turn, then, to Titus's background, the Castle of Gormenghast.

Peake has clearly drawn on images from his own experience for the creation of this monolithic structure: it is London, Sark (especially in the second book) and the walled cities of China with the shacks of the poverty-stricken peasants crawling up the sides. For Peake, moreover, the creation of this vast and rambling structure with its incongruities of style is itself a metaphor for the process of writing a "pantechnicon book" into which he could pour all his "mental furniture." Apparently, Peake had never read The Castle of Otranto, so the similarities between Walpole's castle and Peake's must be seen as the result of a similar turn of mind, rather than a direct influence.⁵² The connection between Gormenghast and the Gothic tradition is very clear, as is the connection between the novel form and the Gothic cathedral, a connection that has been traced by Peter Conrad in The Victorian Treasure-House. He sees Shakespeare as the fountainhead of the "pantechnicon" form of art that combines tragedy and comedy: "Only the novel was able to contain romanticism, and to absorb Shakespeare's example, for it had no rules, it was not a genre, and it did not matter if it became an indifferent whole."⁵³ The correlation between Gothic architecture and the novel (and, by implication, the appropriateness of a Gothic structure at the centre of the novel) is seen in the "sprawling disorderliness of Gothic -- in which, as in the novel, the parts grow out of proportion to the whole" and this "evokes the unconfined expanses of nature."⁵⁴ A fantastic novel, structured around a Gothic castle thus goes to the heart of the significance of the "unconfined," the "abolition of bounds."⁵⁵ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the city becomes the modern equivalent of the Gothic cathedral, and Conrad explores this aspect in the work of Doré and Dickens. His comments apply equally well to the immense and sprawling city which is Gormenghast: ". . . Dickens's city is not a rational, daylight, communal place, but a phantasmagoria of dreams and fears, a city of dreadful night; and it is not a public place, but a fiercely private one, its inhabitants not connected with one another but sealed off in secret shelters, like timorous animals."⁵⁶ So we see Fuchsia in her attic, Sepulchra in his library, the Twins in their Room of Roots, Rottcodd in his Hall of Bright Carvings, Flay haunting the Stone Lanes, the Poet in his tower.

Gormenghast as city is a powerful presence, but so is Gormenghast

the heir to Otranto. The sinister gloom, the oppressive sense of age, weight and size, the labyrinthine tunnels and scarred battlements, the owls and the ivy cannot fail to recall Manfred in pursuit of Isabella to the "lower part of the castle" which "was hollowed into several intricate cloisters. . . . An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors. . . grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness," or Emily's first view of Udolpho, with its "mouldering walls of dark grey stone. . . . [s]ilent, lonely and sublime," or the narrator's first sight of the House of Usher with its "ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows," and its suggestion that the dwelling is the mind of its owner.⁵⁷ An explanation for why Peake should turn to the Gothic at a time of regimented army life and chaotic war is implicit in David Punter's remarks:

We have to ask whether it is an accident that an age marked by the breakdown of accepted class structure, and also by increasing consciousness of this phenomenon, should produce a literature which harks back obsessively to a time of rigid social hierarchisation. We have to ask whether a society in which regulation is experienced, as Goldmann says, as the 'mechanical action of an outside force' would have specific reasons for producing a literature dealing extensively in vulnerability and violence.⁵⁸

Both impulses, that of the search for consolation and compensation, and that of the desire to confront the world through images of that world are suggested by Punter in this passage.

In addition, the Gothic mode has traditionally offered a means of bringing terror to the surface. For Elizabeth MacAndrew, "Gothic fiction is a literature of nightmare. Among its conventions are found dream landscapes and figures of the subconscious imagination."⁵⁹ She goes on to say that "[i]n this literature, the entire tale is symbolic. . . . Unlike the artfully buried symbols customary to a realistic work, the flagrant, all-pervading symbolism of a Gothic tale is almost, though not quite, allegorical. This literature is not allegory because its referents are deliberately hazy."⁶⁰ Despite this, Gay Clifford includes Peake in her study of allegory, seeing the architectural setting as a variation on the "pathetic fallacy" common to allegory, "except that," she parenthesises, "it is less fallacious,

since architecture is made, an artefact, and can therefore with more probability and propriety reflect the moods, intentions, and priorities of human beings," and she goes on to qualify any narrow allegorical reading of Peake's novels, as they reveal "the same kind of individualism that is to be found in Kafka's treatment of the Castle or the Courts of Law: there is no single view of the Stones. Every corner, every corridor, has a different perspective for each character." ⁶¹ Comparing this aspect with the projections of meaning onto Moby Dick, she avers that "the method is allegorical, but the total effect is of allegory à rebours -- no single meaning or place in a pattern of meaning can be claimed for anything seen." ⁶²

This difficulty in pinning down the symbolic significance of the Gothic castle can be seen in glancing at the attempts of various critics. For MacAndrew, it is a "dire and threatening place" which "bears the whole weight of the ages of man's drift away from an ideal state; and it becomes a lasting representation of the torments of the sub-conscious pressing upon the conscious mind and making a prison of the self." ⁶³ For Montague Summers, "[t]he ruin of itself was a thing of beauty." It "impresses the mind with tender melancholy bred from reflexion upon times long since gone." ⁶⁴ For Michael Sadleir, "a ruin expresses the triumph of chaos over order. . . Creepers and weeds, as year by year they riot over sill and paving-stone, defy a broken despotism; every coping-stone that crashes from a castle-battlement into the undergrowth beneath is a small victory for liberty, a snap of the fingers in the face of autocratic power." ⁶⁵ And, finally, William Gaunt comments on "the curious fecundity of ruin, looking very complete at first glance, on closer examination full of contradictions, impossibilities, sinister corners, diverse in statuary, revealing an oddity of form or gesture that mocks and blasphemes in silence." ⁶⁶

The ambiguity of Gormenghast is entirely in keeping with the suggestiveness of the Gothic ruin -- it is at once the image of the mind, an inspiration to tender nostalgia, a breeding place for insurrection, because of its autocratic power, and a terrible warren of the unpredictable, while asserting its material existence, its solidity, in the most uncompromising way. At one level, Titus Groan reads like a guide to the topography of the Castle, the sentences used to describe it conveying at once the visual impulse behind its creation and the sense that only the baroque convolutions of syntax

could embody this labyrinth without a centre. ⁶⁷

The superb opening paragraph leads us towards the Castle in the same way that Orson Welles's camera leads us towards Xanadu, only to retreat at the end of the film with a sense of the inconclusiveness and uncertainty of our response to *Citizen Kane* and the giant castle that mirrors -- literally, in one famous scene -- the mind of its owner. In the same way, we come full circle in Titus Groan, with Rottcodd at the beginning and at the end pondering on the mystery of the Stones:

Gormenghast, that is, the main massing of the original stone, taken by itself would have displayed a certain ponderous architectural quality were it possible to have ignored the circumfusion of those mean dwellings that swarmed like an epidemic around its outer walls. (p.15)

Syntactic qualification in the very first sentence warns us of the impossibility of achieving a comprehensive view or understanding of the Castle. Later in the paragraph, we are given a sense of its age -- the "original stone" with its "time-eaten buttresses" and "broken and lofty turrets," and the "ancient law" that allows the Dwellers to cling to the walls. Its domination is complete, visually and spiritually, defying the heaven that has traditionally stood for the dwelling place of a non-material God. Gormenghast is its own religion, the Tower of Flints with its owls a travesty of the Cross and the dove. Death, decay and the Faustian pact (for the owls are wise with a deep, dark knowledge) set the tone. This is not the playful gaiety of Walpole's Strawberry Hill; it is the shriek of "reaction to everything stuffy and probable" of the Schauer-Romantik. ⁶⁸

Peake's love of opposites also makes its presence felt -- the weighty might of the Castle is in opposition to the "limpets," the "mean dwellings" associated with animals and disease that are feeding off the life-blood of the Castle. This apparently straightforward opposition is radically qualified later however, as we see how strong the presence of death is in the Castle, and how powerful and urgent the passion for life is among the Dwellers. Their Bright Carvings introduce us to Rottcodd's sanctum, where, ironically, they are kept in remote splendour in a candlelit room, where the dust settles and the silence reigns.

The description of the highest region is followed by the description of the lowest, as we plunge with Flay into the Rabelaisian dimensions of Swelter's kitchen. There is a parallel with the kind of mediaeval splendour which Johan Huizinga describes in The Waning of the Middle Ages: "The kitchen regulations are truly Pantagruelistic. We may picture them in operation in the kitchen of heroic dimensions, with its seven gigantic chimneys. . . . The chief cook is seated on a raised chair, overlooking the whole apartment; 'and he must hold in his hand a big wooden ladle which serves him for a double purpose: on the one hand to taste soup and broth, on the other to chase the scullions from the kitchen to their work, and to strike them, if need be.' " ⁶⁹

Flay's retreat into the Stone Lanes offers an opportunity for Peake to stress the chiaroscuro that dominates the Castle. Light and dark shift their outlines in such a way that the characters have difficulty seeing and understanding each other or Gormenghast. ("Adumbrate," "umbrageous," and "in umbra" are words frequently used to describe the Castle). ⁷⁰ As we see Mr. Flay walking through the Lanes, we discover how the very light of the Castle not only diminishes clarity but reduces the occupants to insect-like marionettes:

At times, when the candles were thirty or forty feet apart, Mr Flay would be lost to view and only the sound of his feet on the flagstones would guide his follower. Then slowly, as his erratic shape approached the next guttering aura he would begin by degrees to become a silhouette, until immediately before the candle he would for a moment appear like an inky scarecrow, a mantis of pitch-black cardboard worked with strings. (p.42)

From the Cat room, to the spy-hole, to the great Stone Hall with its flaking ceilings, to Fuchsia's special sanctuary, and the pleasant Christening Room, Peake guides us, yet leaves us with a feeling of having just touched the surface.

At this point, after the Christening, the author presents us with the most sustained and impressive analysis of the way we see, as he tries to take stock of what he has created. As Steerpike claws his way over the spine of the Castle, it seems to grow and grow until the young rebel looks like John Martin's Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion, a tiny figure crawling over a rock while an immeasurable landscape stretches out its cliffs and promontories

before him. Of course, Steerpike is not in search of oblivion, but of supreme control and is seeking to achieve politically what his creator seeks to achieve artistically:

The slope was longer than it had appeared from below. Indeed, all the various roof structures -- parapet, turret and cornice -- proved themselves to be of greater dimensions than he had anticipated. (p.129)

The inaccuracy of his judgement concerning the physical size of the Castle already points to Steerpike's failure fully to grasp its awesome power and, retrospectively, suggests that Titus is guilty of the same failure until his final vision. One cannot reject Gormenghast, but one may assimilate it creatively, by responding to its moods, by accepting its power rather than by denying it or trying to manipulate it. (Hardy explored a similar problem in The Return of the Native, where Eustacia and Tamsin represent alternative ways of responding to the great and brooding majesty of Egdon Heath).

Steerpike's response to the magnificent stone field is a case in point:

The sun was beginning to set in a violet haze and the stone field, save for the tiny figure of Steerpike, spread out emptily, the cold slabs catching the prevailing tint of the sky. Between the slabs there was dark moss and the long coarse necks of seeding grasses. Steerpike's greedy eyes had devoured the arena. Of what use could it be put to? Since his escape this surely was the strongest card for the pack that he intended to collect. (p.130)

The manipulative tactics of Mr. Pye become diabolical here, as darkness descends in a passage very reminiscent of Dickens's description of the fog settling over London in Bleak House: "Darkness over the four wings of Gormenghast. Darkness lying against the glass doors of the Christening Room and pressing its impalpable body through the ivy leaves of Lady Groan's choked window. . . . Darkness over the stone sky-field where clouds moved through it invisibly" (p.131). As Flay is heard by his knees cracking, so the coming of light is sensed rather than seen:

Then he felt, rather than saw, above him a movement of volumes. Nothing could be discerned, but that there were

forces that travelled across the darkness he could not doubt; and then suddenly, as though another layer of stifling cloth had been dragged from before his eyes, Steerpike made out above him the enormous, indistinct shapes of clouds following one another in grave order as though bound on some portentous mission. (p.133)

This is also the penetration of the artist's vision through the darkness to some sense of purpose, until there comes "the crumbling away of a grey veil from the face of the night" and he sees "beyond the furthestmost film of the terraced clouds. . . a swarm of burning crystals, and, afloat in their centre, a splinter of curved fire" (p. 134). But fire is both infernal and Promethean, the "nail of sin" and the gift of the Titan.⁷¹ The artist runs the risk of finding only the former, just as the fire that marks Steerpike's first major step towards power (the burning of the library) becomes the fire that deprives him of his sanity (the burning of Barquentine).

The roofscapes are endless and full of variety, but with discipline and concentration the powers of vision become more acute until its marvels are revealed with delicate precision -- the tree growing out of the wall, with its purple figures, a horse and foal swimming in a tower, a crow that grows from the size of a gnat to that of a moth. At the level of the artist, this is the fantasist's ability to see the tiger-men or the Red Queen in Holborn Underground, if he stares long enough.⁷²

The helplessness felt in the presence of the stone landscape is humorously countered by the comfortable if incongruous Georgian red stone house of the Prunesquallors, and the absurd flight of fancy that is the Twins' Room of Roots, but the main impression remains one of an impregnable, unchanging centre of the world, as timeless and inevitable as the natural cycle, which contains change within the rhythm of repetition:

Autumn returned to Gormenghast like a dark spirit re-entering its stronghold. Its breath could be felt in forgotten corridors, -- Gormenghast had itself become autumn. Even the denizens of this fastness were its shadows.

The crumbling castle, looming among the mists, exhaled the season, and every cold stone breathed it out. The tortured trees by the dark lake burned and dripped, and their leaves snatched by the wind were whirled in wild circles through the towers. The clouds mouldered as they

lay coiled, or shifted themselves uneasily upon the stone skyfield, sending up wreaths that drifted through the turrets and swarmed up the hidden walls.

From high in the Tower of Flints the owls inviolate in their stone galleries cried inhumanly, or falling into the windy darkness set sail on muffled courses for their hunting grounds. (p.196)

This evocative passage is finely placed at the point where the various impressions of Gormenghast, which have been the main burden of the novel up to now, give way to a firmer concentration on the development of the action, as "Flay Brings a Message." The message, concerning the meeting in the library, gives Steerpike his chance to destroy the Earl, and it is in bringing the message that Flay discovers Swelter's murderous intentions. The burning of the library and the duel between the first servant and the cook are the major events which defy the changeless ritual of the castle, and are counterpointed by the "Dark Breakfast" and the "Earling," expressions of the world of ritual.

The "dark spirit" that re-enters Gormenghast is ambiguous in that it is an unquestioned part of the Castle and yet, in the proliferation of Gothic images we see the stirring of violent and irrational forces, like the clouds that shift uneasily on the stone skyfield. And yet, to threaten this world with change is to threaten its very existence, for it is a mythic world:

Stone after grey stone; and a sense of the heaving skywards of great blocks, one upon another in a climbing weight, ponderous and yet alive with the labour of dead days. Yet, at the same time, still; while sparrows, like insects, flickered in wastes of ivy. Still, as though paralysed by its own weight, while about it the momentary motions fluttered and died: a leaf falling: a bull-frog croaking from the moat, or an owl on wings of wool floating earthwards in slow gyres. (p.497)

As C.N. Manlove has pointed out, no verbs are given to the Castle in this passage, freeing it from "any link with the time-bound."⁷³ The Castle exhales the breath of autumn, the breath of the dying year. It exhales a death rattle that paralyses its own being and that of the surrounding life. The suggestion is that, although the Castle will

"out-crumble all" (p.412), for it partakes of the mythic cycle of the "eternal return," it is experiencing the last ages of that mythic world before its own petrification causes it to topple.⁷⁴

In its early ages the mythic world is one of comforting stasis and security, its ritual offering it a shield against calamity, ensuring communal harmony and a sense of meaningful identity. Ritual as a positive force is seen particularly in its connection with play. In Johan Huizinga's words, "in myth and in ritual the great instinctive forces of civilized life have their origin. . . . All are rooted in the *primaeval* soil of play." Play and ritual, ideally, offer an alternative world that is spiritually enriching: "Primitive, or let us say, archaic ritual is. . . sacred play, indispensable for the well-being of the community, fecund of cosmic insight and social development but always play in the sense Plato gave to it -- an action accomplishing itself outside and above the necessities and seriousness of everyday life. In this sphere of sacred play the child and the poet are at home with the savage."⁷⁵ Susanne Langer has also drawn attention to the relationship between play and ritual: "Long before men perform rites which enact the phases of life, they have learned such acting in play."⁷⁶

One cannot, however, deny the serious impulse behind the development of rituals and Langer develops this aspect as follows: "the driving force in human minds is fear, which begets an imperious demand for security in the world's confusion: a demand for a world-picture that fills all experience and gives each individual a definite orientation amid the terrifying forces of nature and society."⁷⁷ Here myth and ritual perform a positive role through what Clyde Kluckhohn has described as "fulfilling the expectancy of the familiar" and "[reducing] the anticipation of disaster."⁷⁸ They are a means of achieving the social cohesion that the individual human being needs to feel secure; they constitute what Joseph Campbell calls "the second womb, the matrix of the postnatal gestation of the placental Homo sapiens."⁷⁹

In the primitive society, man only achieves full being insofar as he repeats primordial actions, at the symbolic centre of the earth, which is every sacred spot, marking the navel of the universe. Mircea Eliade explains:

Just as profane space is abolished by the symbolism of the Center, which projects any temple, palace, or building into the same central point of mythical space, so any meaningful act performed by archaic man, any real act, i.e. any repetition of an archetypal gesture, suspends duration, abolishes profane time, and participates in mythical time. 80

Allied to the devaluation of profane time by means of repetition is the sense of a cyclical structure of time leading to a static world:

[The] eternal return reveals an ontology uncontaminated by time and becoming. Just as the Greeks, in their myth of eternal return, sought to satisfy their metaphysical thirst for the "ontic" and the static (for, from the point of view of the infinite, the becoming of things that perpetually revert to the same state is, as a result, implicitly annulled and it can even be affirmed that "the world stands still"), even so the primitive, by conferring a cyclic direction upon time, annuls its irreversibility. Everything begins over again at its commencement every instant. The past is but a prefiguration of the future. No event is irreversible and no transformation is final. 81

In the Castle of Gormenghast, Peake has created a very effective centre of the universe, self-contained, self-sufficient, supremely unaware of, or indifferent to any world beyond. Keda's wanderings are through vague dream landscapes and she senses that she must return eventually to Gormenghast, for "a power she did not question was inexorably driving her back towards the Dwellings" (p.350). As a post-natal womb, the Castle finds its human image in the huge mother earth figure of the Countess, whose instinctive awareness of threat to the body of the Castle is as real as her ability to communicate with her birds and cats. Her belief in the inevitable submission of all to the sacred centre of the earth is seen in her final words to Titus: "There is nowhere else. . . You will only tread a circle, Titus Groan. There's not a road, not a track, but it will lead you home. For everything comes to Gormenghast" (GG, p.510). Herein lies the denial of both profane time and profane space.

The structure of Titus Groan is itself a denial of chronological sequence as the first half of the book refuses to move beyond the first few days after Titus's birthday. The narrative keeps doubling

back on itself as we see the reactions to the birth, then move back to find out what Fuchsia was doing that day, and forward to the Christening, then back again to find out what happened to Steerpike. Throughout the novel, the action is held up in other ways too. Manlove comments on the way Peake "constantly injects stillness into the action" by means of digressive description.⁸² One example of this is that astonishing metaphorical flight that Peake indulges in when Flay and Swelter stand before Sepulchre's door:

Had the flesh, the fibres, and the bones of the chef and those of Mr Flay been conjured away and away down that dark corridor leaving only their four eyes suspended in mid-air outside the Earl's door, then, surely, they must have reddened to the hue of Mars, reddened and smouldered, and at last broken into flame, so intense was their hatred -- broken into flame and circled about one another in ever-narrowing gyres and in swifter and yet swifter flight until, merged into one sizzling globe of ire they must surely have fled, the four in one, leaving a trail of blood behind them in the cold grey air of the corridor, until, screaming as they fly beneath innumerable arches and down the endless passageways of Gormenghast, they found their eyeless bodies once again, and re-entrenched themselves in startled sockets. (p. 365)

And this is where the action is picking up! The piling up of clause upon clause, image upon bizarre image reveals the talent of the Nonsense writer, yet the description is entirely in keeping with the apocalyptic dimension of the ensuing struggle between Flay and Swelter. Their moonlit fight in the unearthly Hall of Spiders also has a lot in common with the dream movements of the fight between Rantel and Braigon, and those much-maligned passages dealing with Keda and the Dwellers do serve to slow down the action, often casting a trance-like atmosphere over the book (especially in the chapters entitled "Roof of Reeds" and "Fever").⁸³

If this denial of profane space and time is to succeed, however, the myth and ritual that underpins it must arise from what Ernst Cassirer has called a "unity of feeling" and in the springtime of myth, this "unity of feeling," together with a sense of play, is a real component.⁸⁴ But Gormenghast is the "stronghold" of autumn, and where the birth of the hero traditionally implies revival and the regeneration of mythic time in rituals that echo the cosmogonic cycle,

the autumn phase of the world of the novel throws the time out of joint. This is nowhere more clearly to be seen than in the way in which the innumerable rituals to which we are witness fail to involve the participants in a "unity of feeling."

The first ritual of which we are told is that of the annual summer display of the wood carvings, into which the Carvers have sculpted all their bitter love and fierce energy. Their reward is to have the best three "relegated to the Hall of Bright Carvings" (p.16), while the rest are burnt, and between the Carvers rage hostility and envy. The nature of artistic creation as that which engenders imaginative excitement and fresh ways of seeing, is here denied. Its original role in a unifying ritual is debased. In relating play to art, Huizinga suggests that the plastic arts are "bound to matter and to the limitations of form inherent in it," which is "enough to forbid them absolutely free play and deny them that flight into the ethereal spaces open to music and poetry."⁸⁵ In this sense, it is appropriate that the one form of art sanctioned to the mud dwellers should be one removed from a sense of the liberation of play. On the other hand, Huizinga points out that the plastic arts did have a "place and function very largely in ritual, as objects of sacred significance," related to the delight in ornamentation and the desire to display the image as a "votive gift."⁸⁶ Here, in Gormenghast, the votive gifts are either destroyed or shut up on the top floor of the ninth wing. To a certain extent one may see a comment on the divorce between the people and museum-bound cultural artefacts, something which John Berger has analysed.⁸⁷ Art, like ritual, has ceased to be a living, penetrative force.

The travesty of the creative spirit in the first chapter is followed by the travesty of the carnival spirit in the second. Seen through the eyes of Flay, the "ribald excitement" is distasteful but appropriate: "Technically this was more the spirit which Flay liked to see, or at all events thought to be more appropriate to the occasion. Rottcodd's lack of enthusiasm had shocked him and here, at any rate, the traditional observance of felicity at the birth of an heir to Gormenghast was being observed" (pp.25-26). Mikhail Bakhtin has written a lively account of the carnival spirit as it existed in mediaeval times and points to the "striving toward renewal and a new birth" that was central to this spirit, using the grotesque forms

as a means of release

to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things.⁸⁸

The emphasis on freshness and regeneration makes the carnival spirit particularly important where a birth is concerned. Titus's birth, in these terms, demands the kind of Saturnalia we see in the kitchen. But there lies the problem -- the "second world" and "second life outside officialdom" is localized in the kitchen.⁸⁹ Rottcodd does not even know of the birth and later we find out that neither did Fuchsia. Where the sense of communal regeneration is vital to the sense of carnival, here we have dissonant images: Flay's revulsion, Steerpike's isolation, Fuchsia's anger, Sepulchre's melancholy, Gertrude's indifference.⁹⁰ The agile dwarf swinging from the rafters and grinning grotesquely at Flay appears to partake of the spirit of mockery, the reversal of hierarchical order, even the destruction of the old order to make way for its rebirth. But here he is, as is the celebration of the kitchen as a whole, sanctioned and contained by the old order. The true festal spirit has been effectively undercut. The sense of identity with an enriching community is also violently parodied in the Grey Scrubbers, who look like the Epsilon semi-morons of Huxley's Brave New World.⁹¹ Their faces have become identical to the grey slabs of stone that they scrub every day: "They were simply slabs that the Grey Scrubbers spoke from occasionally, stared from incessantly, heard with, hardly ever. They were traditionally deaf. The eyes were there, small and flat as coins, and the colour of the walls themselves, as though during the long hours of professional staring the grey stone had at last reflected itself indelibly once and for all" (p. 28). Furthermore their participation in the celebration has been of a singularly uninspiring and debilitating kind and, having all got drunk, they now lie in a passage leading nowhere, their cropped heads in a row like "curled-up hedgehogs" (p.29).

When we turn to the three central rituals related to Titus -- the Christening, the Breakfast and the Earling -- we find a similar breakdown in the unitive and rejuvenating functions of ritual. Instead of enabling a creative orientation toward a mysterious world, instead of protecting against disaster, the ritual structures have become as paralysed as the Castle whose values they endorse. There is a dangerous disunity of feeling resulting in an increasingly individualistic splintering off from the community of the Castle, especially on the part of those who are most oppressed by the demands of ritual. Archaic societies, believing the king to have the power of preserving peace, and of regenerating the cosmos, would subject him to all the rituals involved in ensuring the mythic order. Freud quotes Frazer on this subject in Totem and Taboo:

'A king. . . lives hedged in by a ceremonious etiquette, a network of prohibitions and observances, of which the intention is not to contribute to his dignity, much less his comfort, but to restrain him from conduct which, by disturbing the harmony of nature, might involve himself, his people, and the universe in one common catastrophe. Far from adding to his comfort, these observances, by trammelling his every act, annihilate his freedom and often render the very life, which it is their object to preserve, a burden and sorrow to him.' 92

Thus, the melancholy Sepulchrave has to scratch a half moon on the iron cupboard in the armoury twice a year: "It was not certain what significance the ceremony held, for unfortunately the records were lost, but the formality was no less sacred for being unintelligible" (p.295). At one point, he has to "ascend and descend the Tower of Flints three times by the stone staircase, leaving on each occasion a glass of wine on a box of wormwood placed there for the purpose on a blue turret" (p.329). The second tome of the law is the perfect image for this code of rituals without myth (in the sense of a story validating it): "The second tome was full of blank pages and was entirely symbolic. . . ." (p.66).

That there was once a time when initiative was taken and precedent set is hinted at here and there. Sepulchrave's great grandfather painted the cherubs on the ceiling (p.62), his grandfather wrote essays (p.204), the twelfth lord was responsible for part of the Christening liturgy (p.113), and the seventeenth earl established the ritual

greeting for the Bright Carvers (p.91). At some stage the "precedent for Experiment" (p.202) was created and there is something both eerie and plaintive in the discription of halls that once saw dancing, of pavilions, observatories, museums and aviaries, suggestive of a time long ago when the Castle knew a wholeness of life (pp. 202-203).

As it is, Pentecost the gardener with his deep love for nature, and his artist's love for colour, tries to create a place of lightness and beauty:

The Christening Room itself looked cool and clear and unperturbed. With space and dignity it awaited the entrance of the characters. The flowers in their vases were incredibly gracious. Pentecost had chosen lavender as the dominant note for the room, but here and there a white flower spoke coolly to a white flower across the green carpet spaces and one gold orchid was echoed by another. (pp. 101-102)

This fresh harmony is not to last, however, for in walks Flay, looking like a scarecrow and glaring malevolently at the flowers. The harmony is effectively shattered by the violence that ensues between the Earl's servant and the obese cook. "This violence had set a bitter keynote to the ensuing hours," comments the author later (p.111). But the possibility that the ritual could be a pleasant affair is proved illusory by more than Flay's attack on Swelter. The pleasantness of the ritual would depend on the spirit of happy sharing and active participation of those involved. But the characters move towards the Christening Room as individuals, indomitably separate from each other: "Each one with his or her particular stride. His or her particular eyes, nose, mouth, hair, thoughts and feelings. Self-contained, carrying their whole selves with them as they moved, as a vessel that holds its own distinctive wine, bitter or sweet. These seven closed their doors behind them, terrifyingly themselves, as they set out for the Cool Room" (p. 105). Predictably, this is the least used room in a Castle which instead of unifying its denizens, has succeeded in atomizing them. The parallel between Castle and city is most forcibly suggested here, or Castle and army, where the soldier's body may be present but his mind is free to dream of "gods who laze in ether." 93

The absurdity of this ritual that should be vitally significant in the lives of the characters, is stressed by the way in which Peake proceeds to undercut the liturgy by means of asides and digressions. Swelter and Flay are the subjects of a slightly parodic reflexiveness, as they stand on either side of Sourdust "balancing from the artist's point of view if not the rationalist's, the components of the picture" (p. 106). This artist's awareness is echoed when Nannie enters with Titus: "[T]he two of them as they appeared before the assembly made up for their three seconds' tardiness by a preposterous quality that was in perfect harmony with the situation" (p. 116). The delight in contrasts finds ludicrous expression in the presence of Doctor Prunesquallor and the Twins at this solemn occasion. They behave like actors in some zany farce, or bizarre vaudeville show, the Twins playing straight women to Prunesquallor's garrulous and Nonsensical hysteria. Prunesquallor flouts etiquette by taking a "small emerald cake" off the pile "as neatly. . . as though he were at home in his dissecting room and were removing some organ from a frog" (p. 107). His nervous laugh and escape route through Nonsense marks his presence: "For if I enjoy a cedar but a cedar does not, ha, ha, enjoy me, then surely I am at once in a position of compromise, being, as it were, ignored by the vegetable world. . . ." (p. 108). The Twins with their faces "identical to the point of indecency" simply repeat their formula: "It's power we want," in expressionless voices (pp. 109-111). Thus, by the time Sourdust starts intoning there is very little dignity or decorum left and the tautological opening line does not improve matters: "All are gathered save only him, for whom this gathering is gathered. All are here save only he for whom we all are here" (pp. 111-112). Nevertheless, there is an ominous warning in the words that dictate Titus's future, for he must be "tuned" to the voice of Gormenghast, "whose voice is endlessness of endlessness," until he "dies across the Groan's death-turret" (p. 113). This is a marriage between Gormenghast and its "untarnished child-shaped mirror" (p. 112) demanded by the Stones, and if he betrays them, the Voices will haunt him to the end. Sourdust's chant, with its repetition of "all" and its personification of the Castle and its surroundings effectively expresses the inescapable, all-encompassing nature of the Stones, as well as their metaphorical relationship to Titus.

Just when the ceremony appears to be progressing favourably, however, Sourdust is shocked to see "no ceremonial curve of the select, but a room of scattered individuals," the Doctor gracefully inclined over a flower and the Twins standing with "their bodies facing each other but their heads staring in Fuchsia's direction," having just comforted her with the knowledge that they had their epileptic fits at just about her age (pp. 117-119). The Countess, having already asked when the liturgy would finish, stands in a state of coma. The breakdown in ritual and cohesion is symbolically ratified by Titus's "first recorded act of blasphemy" as he falls from the Book of Baptism, tearing a page (P. 119). Manlove's irritatingly prosaic reading of Titus's failures to adhere to the ritual patterns here and later seems to stem from an unwillingness to read these scenes as symbols for a general disintegration of significant ritual acts. This disintegration finds expression in the little prince for whom nothing seems to go right, for whom the time is clearly out of joint.⁹⁴ The aborted rituals that mark his entry into the world prefigure his later difficulties in coming to terms with that world, with its ancestor worship, and its present validated by its past. As the Christening threatens to break up, the Countess rises to the occasion with the initiative she shows later in Gormenghast's greatest hour of need. She orders a walk, which saves the ritual at the expense of orthodoxy, an orthodoxy whose tenuous hold is stressed by the image of the characters who each choose a stripe of mown lawn:

They took their pace from the slowest of them, which was Sourdust. The cedars spread over them from the northern side as they began their journey. Their figures dwindling as they moved away on the striped emerald of the shaven lawn. Like toys; detachable, painted toys, they moved each one on his mown stripe. (p. 122).

The regularity of the lawns is countered by the spreading cedars, just as the figures are at once confined by ritual, reduced to automata, yet separate on the stripe of his or her own choosing, and the chapter closes with a resurgence of antagonism against the ritual as Fuchsia clasps Nannie and Titus in her arms.

Where incongruities of character and the asides of the narrator undercut the solemnity of the Christening, a much more ambitious

technique is used to undercut the value of the Breakfast as a communal feast celebrating the first birthday of the heir to the Stones. Elisabeth Gardaz has pointed out that "on the one hand, there's a strict logical structure in the organization of the chapter; on the other, there's the marvellous, free and formidable word-spinning of the reveries themselves." She notes that the order of the eight reveries "rigorously follows the placing of the characters round the table" and that Peake "articulates the reveries in relation to each other by localizing a single sound in space. . . the thud of Fuchsia's head hitting the table," which, through repeated reference, serves to "translate the simultaneousness of the reveries." ⁹⁵

Once more, then, we have the rigidity of a time-honoured ritual, here reflected in the very structuring of the chapter, undermined by the dissociation of feeling, the stream-of-consciousness technique emphasising the separateness and introversion of the individual characters. The pervasive sense of threat is much stronger here than at the Christening, however. We were introduced to the Cool Room as a pleasant, airy building tended to by Pentecost, whose very name suggests a state of blessed inspiration and the gift for communication, and whose life is involved with all that lives and grows:

As he walked it seemed that he was moving into the earth. Each stride was a gesture, a probing. It was a kind of downward, inward search, as though he knew that what was important for him, what he really understood and cared for, was below him, beneath his slowly moving feet. It was in the earth -- it was the earth. (p. 99)

As we approach the Breakfast, however, we do so with the knowledge not only of a feud between the servants, but of the Earl's insanity, the banishment of Flay and the increasing evil of Steerpike. We enter the Dining Hall, a "cold stone desert" with its flaking cherubs and flagstones that become increasingly damp as the rain penetrates the ceiling and forms a pool on the floor. Instead of cedars, "regular pillars," instead of Pentecost, Swelter, whose weight draws him to the earth, but whose obscene nature is a perversion of the life-giving instincts: "As he bends, the shimmering folds of the silk about his belly hiss and whisper like the voice of

far and sinister waters or like some vast, earthless ghost-cat sucking its own breath" (pp. 360-361). It is, indeed, the "dark breakfast," as the vile Barquentine, so different from his sentimental tearful father, conducts the formalities.

It follows from this intensely gloomy atmosphere that the possibilities for achieving a festal spirit are even less likely than they were before, and that the isolation of the characters will be even more drastic. Mikhail Bakhtin's comments on the official feast of the Middle Ages, as opposed to the true carnival feast are interesting, and seem to offer an appropriate way of reading the Breakfast scene:

. . . the official feasts of the Middle Ages . . . did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life. On the contrary, they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it. . . . Actually, the official feast looked back at the past and used the past to consecrate the present. Unlike the earlier and purer feast, the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It was the triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward as eternal and indisputable. This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it. The true nature of human festivity was betrayed and distorted. 96

As Barquentine rasps out the formulas and as the food gets cold, it is hardly surprising to find the characters drifting off into reveries, absurd, touching, terrifying and revealing. Cora, Clarice, Irma and Nannie are fairly predictable, but Doctor Prunesquallor's reverie shows the extent to which he has become a sympathetic character. "His cardinal virtue? An undamaged brain" (GG, p. 12). He is both the funny spinner of Nonsense monologues and an intelligent, sensitive and deeply concerned man. The parody of medical jargon ("hydrophondoramischromatica of ash"), the airy apostrophes to "all the bottle gods and powder princes," and the incongruous oaths ("there is something very unhealthy about all this by all that's bursting into flower in an April dell") are all countered by his instinctive recognition of Steerpike's evil, Gertrude's shirking of responsibility and the fact that Fuchsia

is both "sensitive and intelligent" (pp. 393-394). Prunesquallor's assessment of Fuchsia is endorsed by the fineness with which she analyses her father's illness. She is aware of the connection between the owls and the books, and is crying out for someone to love: ". . . and I will take care of him for I understand because the tower was there the tower was over his long line of books his books and its shadow fell across his library at morning always always father dear the Tower of Flints that the owls live in. . . ." (p. 395). She also has an instinctive understanding that her father's madness is partly the result of his having cut himself off from the physical natural world, and in a lovely and lyrical way she makes a tender promise to him: ". . . and I will bring you flowers of every kind of colour and shape and speckled stones that look like frogs and ferns and all the beautiful things I can find. . . ." (p. 395). Gertrude's apparent indifference to all that goes on in the Castle is also importantly qualified by her reverie, which suggests a natural pragmatism and intelligence. Like the Doctor, she recognises Steerpike's threat, but fails to recognise the value of the Doctor (this is remedied in Gormenghast where she finally turns to him for advice). She is also acutely aware of the kind of schizophrenia the Castle imposes on those on whom it most depends, and she seeks to reconcile her powerful belief in the rightness of Gormenghast with the need for a private existence:

. . . now here is a son for Gormenghast which is what the Castle needed and when he is older I will teach him how he can take care of himself and how to live his own life as far as it is possible for one who will find the grey stones across his heart from day to day and the secret is to be able to freeze the outsider off completely and then he will be able to live within himself. . . it is good that Titus is born for the line of the Groans must never be broken through me and there must be no ending at all and no ending and I shall tell him of his heritage and honour and of how to keep his head above the interwoven nest and watch the seasons move by and the sounds of the feathered throats. . . . (pp. 398-400)

Thus, the chapter on the Dark Breakfast suggests a more complex interaction between ritual and individual response, than was suggested at the Christening. Ritual has not fully deadened sympathy between individuals, and those individuals experience interest in

each other within the context of ritual. In *Gertrude* we also see the ambiguous attitude toward the restrictions imposed by the Castle, and toward the Castle itself.

The final major ceremony in the book is that of the Earling. "The day of the 'Earling' was a day of rain. Monotonous, sullen, grey rain with no life in it. It had not even the power to stop" (p. 484). Indeed, the rain becomes the leit motif for the latter third of the book. At the Breakfast, "[t]he drumming of the thick vertical rain on the roof is a background to everything that happens" (p. 388). As Flay awaits Swelter on the fatal night of their battle, "the enormous midnight gave up all control, opening out her cumulous body from horizon to horizon, so that the air became solid with so great a weight of falling water that Flay could hear the limbs of trees breaking through a roar of foam" (p. 419).

On the occasion of the Earling, the sense of the rain's inappropriateness is stressed by the heads that stare from the windows and by the remorseless repetition: "A hundred figures leant across the sills of the Southern wall, and stared. They would disappear back into the darkness, one by one, but others would have appeared at other windows. There would always be about a hundred starers. Rain. The slow rain. The East and the West of the Castle watched the rain. It was to be a day of rain . . . There could be no stopping it." (p. 484). The breakdown in harmony between the Castle and the natural elements is explicitly stated:

It was the Greatest Day. And it rained. . . .The steady monotone of the pattering rain was depressing enough, but for it to descend on such a day was sheer gloom. It was as though it defied the Castle's inmost faith; taunted it with a dull, ignorant descent of blasphemy, as though the undrainable clouds were muttering: 'What is an Earling to us? It is immaterial'.

(p. 484-486).

The blasphemy of the Tower of Flints pointing at heaven is turned back on itself. The traditional association of summer with fullness, ripeness, "apotheosis" and "entering into Paradise," so necessary for an archaic civilization which sees itself sanctioned by nature

and the cosmic order, is destroyed. This society now finds that the rain is falling, for Gormenghast is autumn, is at one with the season of slow decay.⁹⁷ Summer is seen as the season of disease in a passage which is a counterpoint to the earlier description of autumn:

Summer was on the roofs of Gormenghast. It lay inert, like a sick thing. Its limbs spread. It took the shape of what it smothered. The masonry sweated and was horribly silent. The chestnuts whitened with dust and hung their myriads of great hands with every wrist broken.

What was left of the water in the moat was like soup. A rat floundered across it, part swimming, part walking. Thick sepia patches of water were left in the unhealthy scum where its legs had broken through the green surface.
(p. 413)

We read, moreover, that the sun was "never more than a rayless disc this summer" (p. 412, emphasis added). With this unnatural, suffocating heat hardly broken at all by the untimely rain, "[w]arm melancholy and perpetual" (p. 489), the atmosphere of foreboding is created, the feeling that the ritual to follow will reveal its fossilized state and its threat to itself, as a breeding ground for individual rebellion.

The description of the Earling is different from that of the other two ceremonies in that we are more overtly aware of the omniscient narrator presenting a comprehensive view of the spectacle at a distance. Where we were introduced to the Christening through Pentecost's preparations and to the Breakfast through Swelters, here the preparations are a mass activity, a deep personalized marshalling of the Castle's forces. Swelter's replacement is simply called "the new chef" (p. 486), and collective and plural nouns predominate: "the kitchen staff," "the carpenters," the Grey Scrubbers, the Raft Makers, "the stable boys" (pp. 484 ff.). The only one marked out as having a controlling power over the ceremony is, significantly, Steerpike, whom we know to be planning the subversion of the Castle. His significant isolation is stressed by his choosing to seat himself in "a small ash, where he could both be seen and could see with equal advantage to himself and the rest of Gormenghast" (p. 490).

In presenting the vast congregation seated or standing around the lake, Peake retains authorial control to the extent that, instead of the directly rendered speech of the Christening or the entry into the minds of the characters in the reveries, he frequently employs the free indirect mode when concentrating on individual responses to the Earling. In the case of Nannie, the ironic distance created is gently mocking: "But -- oh, her poor heart! -- this was so different. It would never have rained at an 'Earling' when she was a young girl. Things were so different then" (p. 490). With Fuchsia, the distancing stresses her vulnerability, her isolation from sympathy. We see her obliquely and can only enter into her fear for the Castle by indirection. By extension, our relationship to the Castle is similarly qualified:

What was it about them that quickened her -- those people of the Outer Wall? Why did she feel ill at ease? It was as though they held a dark secret of which, one day, they would make use; something which would jeopardize the security of the Castle. (p. 492)

The instinctive, protective nature of Fuchsia's feelings toward the Castle revealed here would find a more unequivocal echo in the reader's response if this were rendered directly. As it is, the ambiguity of response is deliberately controlled by the free indirect mode.

Finally, the centrality of Steerpike to the scene is also severely qualified by the ironic authorial voice, which emphasises the young upstart's smugness, arrogance, complacency: "He knew her temperament. Simple -- painfully simple; inclined to be passionate over ridiculous things; headstrong -- but a girl, nevertheless, and easy to frighten or to flatter; absurdly loyal to the few friends she had; but mistrust could always be sown quite easily" (p. 492). We recall Prunesquallor's assessment of Fuchsia at the Breakfast and later we shall see how Steerpike's underestimating of Fuchsia contributes to his downfall.

What all this distancing achieves, then, is the qualification of our personal involvement in the ritual, and the sense that any response to the sanctity and glory of the Castle must be an

ambiguous one. The rain which spoils the day becomes merely a question of fashion in Nannie's mind ("Things were so different then"), while Fuchsia's sense of the Castle's danger is seen from a remote perspective and Steerpike as threat is treated ironically. Further authorial comment undermines the sacredness of the occasion, notably the description of Barquentine trying to get onto his stage: "It took place to the accompaniment of such hideous swearing as caused his withered leg to blush beneath the sacking. It must have been hardened by many years of oaths, but this morning an awakened sense of shame at what the upper part of the body could descend to, raddled it from hip to toe" (p. 492). Barquentine's appalling lack of dignity becomes more and more obvious as the ceremony proceeds, highlighting the "preposterous quality" (p. 116) of much that is taking place, such as the men who swim out with Titus and then have to hide their heads behind the raft while treading water.

As the characters are distanced and as the ritual comes to seem increasingly absurd, the focus on Titus is strengthened, and this becomes a climactic moment for him in a way not anticipated by the denizens of the fortress. At the same time our sympathy with the baby counters any sympathy for the formless mass surrounding him, clearly representative of Gormenghast. His smallness, his trembling lips, his courage as he decides to stand up rather than cry serve to engender antagonism against all that stands behind his ordeal, just as Fuchsia's response to the Christening was a strictly personal one: "[Y]ou've made her cry, you beasts!" (p.125). Of course, when Titus calmly throws "the sacrosanct symbols" (p. 496), the stone and the ivy branch into the lake, it is not a conscious declaration of war against the Castle, and I do not think that Peake meant it to be seen as such. But it is a spontaneous gesture, a natural one and, in this way, becomes a symbol of the resurfacing of spontaneity and individual response that have smouldered in the secret places of the Castle for too long. Titus's action is a challenge to Gertrude's pragmatic schizophrenia, and receives heaven's blessing as the sky clears. The symbolic nature of the scene is made even clearer by the cries of Titus and the foster-sister who is to play such an important role in Gormenghast. The rainbow curves like a promise over the lake and summer is once more true to itself.

The emphasis on Titus's natural environment is important. During the Christening he is placed between the leaves of the "sere Text" (p. 116); at the Breakfast he is wrapped up so tightly that he appears to be a little tube in danger of being trodden on by Barquentine. At the Earling, however, he stands unencumbered between the sky and the water. Nature calls to his innocent impulses and he responds. It is appropriate that the air should seem fresher:

The terrain about them was as though freshly painted, or rather, as though like an old landscape that had grown dead and dull it had been varnished and now shone out anew, each fragment of the enormous canvas, pristine, the whole, a glory. (p. 503)

It would appear that Titus is destined, not to bring ruin to the Castle (it has enough of that already), but to rejuvenate it, not to defy its ritual so much as to restore it to its original purpose of creating harmony and security, and to restore a sense of joy and play, a sense of spontaneity fused with precious order.

This hopeful prospect seems doomed from the start, however, for we have already been warned that nothing can change or divert Gormenghast: "Drear ritual turned its wheel. The ferment of the heart, within these walls, was mocked by every length of sleeping shadow. The passions, no greater than candle flames, flickered in Time's yawn, for Gormenghast, huge and adumbrate, out-crumbles all " (p. 412). The Castle suppresses natural impulses and not even Titus, in whom these impulses seem to be unusually strong for an heir to Gormenghast, can avoid being swallowed by the Castle in the last view we have from Rottcodd's window:

The leading mare with Titus on her back, still fast asleep in the wickerwork saddle, was by now approaching that vaster shadow, cast by the Castle itself, which fanned itself out prodigiously, like a lake of morose water from the base of the stone walls. (p. 503)

The "lake of morose water" replaces "the sparkling water" (p. 496) of that other lake. The image of the Castle as Moloch feeding off her children, needing them to survive but denying them their open individuality, or the free expression of their creative instincts,

is developed as the colours of the procession dim:

One by one the tiny figures lost their toy-like
brilliance and were swallowed. The hair of the Countess
was quenched like an ember in that sullen bay. The
feline cloud at her feet was now a smoke-grey mist.
One by one, the bright shapes moved into the shadow
and were drowned. (p. 504)

The "bright shapes" suffer the same fate as the Bright Carvings that are burnt or stored away in Rottcodd's dusty loft. It is noticeable that Peake uses the automata image for each of the three main rituals. At the Christening, the characters are compared to "detachable, painted toys" (p. 122) as they walk on the lawn; at the end of the Breakfast we see Barquentine and the Twins "trapped in the shadows of the hall. . . . the vitriolic marionette in his crimson rags and the two stiff purple puppets" (p. 406), and finally the "toy-like brilliance" of the figures after the Earling. But this brilliance, granted by the rainbow, is "swallowed" by the shadow. The smothering control of the Castle is apparent. These lives are only meaningful insofar as they fulfil the needs of the Castle:

Somewhere, something had been shattered -- something heavy as a great globe and brittle like glass; and it had been shattered, for the air swam freely and the tense, aching weight of the emptiness with its insistent drumming had lifted. He had heard nothing but he knew that he was no longer alone. The castle had drawn breath. (p. 505)

This is Rottcodd's sense of normality returning to the Castle in the final chapter of the book, where we find we have come full circle, except that, where we were introduced to Gormenghast from the outside, we now gaze upon it from the inside and, to a certain extent, we partake of Rottcodd's ambiguous response to the Castle. Desiring to be left to himself, he is bitter at not being included in the life of the Castle. In a post-Romantic age, the individual is supremely important, but he risks alienation if the comfort of myth and ritual is rejected. This ambiguity is contained in the image of the shattered globe. Colin Greenland has traced the recurrence of this image throughout Peake's work and points out that the

Breakfast ceremony begins "with the smashing of the central Vase" (p. 390), symbolic of breaking with the old, to begin anew.

"At its most specific," he writes, "the 'globe' represents Gormenghast itself, its ponderous solidity having proved extremely fragile under the different forces exerted by Steerpike and Titus himself. More generally, it is a symbol for tradition, an antique shape once golden and flowing. . . but long since grown hard and cold, inert." ⁹⁸ Thus, breaking the globe is both central to Gormenghast's ritual and the symbol of its fragility; the globe and its shattering are equally necessary.

In Gormenghast we find an image of an archaic culture in its final stages of petrification, albeit a petrification that gives the impression of outlasting Doomsday. The important point is that myth and ritual as forces creating a community have, for lack of a breadth of vision that can contain the unique within the unity, at last failed to inspire unquestioning devotion in the inhabitants of the Castle. The characters grumble, protest, criticize and ridicule the rituals, even as they take part in them. There is a split between the overt act and the covert feeling, a split that needs to be healed if the Castle is to re-experience the harmony of the dance to which the deserted halls bare silent witness.

Ernst Cassirer's study of myth and religion describes a world in some ways like the Middle Ages, in some ways like ancient China, in many ways like Gormenghast:

In myth and in primitive religion the tendency to stabilization is so strong that it entirely outweighs the opposite pole. These two cultural phenomena seem to be the most conservative powers in human life. Mythical thought is, by its origin and by its principle, traditional thought. For myth has no means of understanding, explaining, and interpreting the present form of human life other than to reduce it to a remote past. What has its roots in this mythical past, what has been ever since, what has existed from immemorial times, is firm and unquestionable. To call it into question would be a sacrilege. For the primitive mind there is no more sacred thing than the sacredness of age. It is age that gives to all things, to physical objects and to human institutions, their value, their dignity, their moral and religious worth. In order to maintain this dignity it becomes imperative to continue and to preserve the human order in the same unalterable shape. Any breach of continuity

would destroy the very substance of mythical and religious life. From the point of view of primitive thought the slightest alteration in the established scheme of things is disastrous. The words of a magic formula, of a spell or incantation, the single phases of a religious act, of a sacrifice or a prayer, all this must be repeated in one and the same invariable order. Any change would annihilate the force and efficiency of the magical word or religious rite. Primitive religion can therefore leave no room for any freedom of individual thought. It prescribes its fixed, rigid, inviolable rules not only for every human action but also for every human feeling. The life of man is under a constant pressure. It is enclosed in the narrow circle of positive and negative demands, of consecrations and prohibitions, of observances and taboos. 99

Hence, Titus is simply the "freshet of the unending river," Sepulchrae "a mere link in the dynastic chain," both only significant insofar as they are "one with the inviolable law" (p. 116). Hence, the terror of Sourdust should the Earl not raise his eyebrow at twenty to ten (p. 65), and the fury of Barquentine when Titus fails to hold the stone and ivy. Cassirer goes on to describe how, historically, the ban on human freedom relaxed to give way to a dynamic religion, but Gormenghast, "huge and adumbrate, out-crumbles all" (p. 412). If there is to be a movement towards a dynamic interaction between individual and myth, the force, it seems, will have to be a personal one. Thus we see the most creative responses to the Castle in the way in which individual characters develop their own private rituals, live their own private dreams. On the other hand, there are the characters who have private rituals, secret worlds, but who fail to find an outlet for growth, so that these worlds simply become Gormenghast in microcosm.

To some extent, the difference between these characters may be seen in terms of the grotesque and the ways Peake uses it. It might, thus, be useful to consider the implications of the grotesque. Edmund Little's article on Peake and Gogol draws attention to "[a] chilling feature of Gormenghast and NN." -- "the absence of beauty in landscape and physical form, and the lack of love in human relations." ¹⁰⁰ This is a generalisation, but does raise the issue of Peake's use of the grotesque to characterise the inhabitants of the Castle. Critics of the grotesque fall roughly

into two groups: those who emphasise the positive, regenerative aspect and those who emphasise the negative, destructive aspects, or, more simply, those who see laughter as central and those who see terror as the main impulse.

For Victor Hugo, the grotesque was a way of acknowledging the variety of life:

Le beau n'a qu'un type; le laid en a mille. C'est que le beau, à parler humainement, n'est que la forme considérée dans son rapport le plus simple, dans sa symétrie la plus absolue, dans son harmonie la plus intime avec notre organisation. Aussi nous offre-t-il toujours un ensemble complet, mais restreint comme nous. Ce que nous appelons le laid, au contraire, est un détail d'un grand ensemble qui nous échappe, et qui s'harmonise non pas avec l'homme, mais avec la création tout entière. Voilà pourquoi il nous présente sans cesse des aspects nouveaux, mais incomplets.¹⁰¹

Bakhtin supports this view, seeing "the ever-laughing principle" as central to "grotesque realism" as it originated in folk culture.¹⁰² Hugo's comment on the completeness and symmetry of the beautiful form is echoed by Bakhtin's analysis of the Renaissance ideal of the body:

As conceived by these canons, the body was first of all a strictly completed, finished product. Furthermore, it was isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies. All signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated; its protuberances and offshoots were removed, its convexities (signs of new sprouts and buds) smoothed out, its apertures closed.¹⁰³

The grotesque, on the other hand, originally exhibited a playful treatment of plant, animal and vegetable forms as they merge into each other: "The last thing one can say of the real grotesque is that it is static; on the contrary it seeks to grasp in its imagery the very act of becoming and growth, the eternal incomplete unfinished nature of being."¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Chesterton praises Dickens for his "English feeling of a grotesque democracy."¹⁰⁵ "Every day," he assures us, "we are missing a monster whom we might easily love, and an imbecile whom we should certainly admire. This is the real gospel of Dickens; the inexhaustible opportunities offered by the liberty

and the variety of man." ¹⁰⁶ Peake's head-hunting expeditions were undertaken precisely to find this "variety of man."

There is another side to the grotesque, however, the side that John Ruskin found disturbing. Of the artist of the "true grotesque" he says: "It is because the dreadfulness of the universe around him weighs upon his heart that his work is wild; and therefore through the whole of it we shall find the evidence of deep insight into nature." ¹⁰⁷ G.Wilson Knight sees in King Lear "a peculiar dualism. . . which wrenches and splits the mind by a sight of incongruities" and "displays in turn realities absurd, hideous, pitiful." ¹⁰⁸ The "grin" is "demonic," the humour is "grim" and we are subject to "cosmic mockery." ¹⁰⁹ Wolfgang Kayser's study, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, follows a similar line:

The grotesque world is -- and is not -- our own world. The ambiguous way in which we are affected by it results from our awareness that the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence. 110

Laughter takes on a darker tone:

Laughter originates on the comic and caricatural fringe of the grotesque. Filled with bitterness, it takes on characteristics of the mocking, cynical, and ultimately satanic laughter while turning into the grotesque. . . . the grotesque is a play with the absurd. It may begin in a gay and carefree manner -- as Raphael wanted to play in his grotesques. But it may also carry the player away, deprive him of his freedom, and make him afraid of the ghosts which he so frivolously invoked. 111

Kayser looks beyond this, however, in a way which recalls Peake's attempt to look beyond his madness:

In spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces which lurk in and behind our world and have power to estrange it, the truly artistic portrayal effects a secret liberation. The darkness has been sighted, the ominous powers discovered, the incomprehensible forces challenged. And thus we arrive at a final interpretation of the grotesque: an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world. 112

The grotesque is related to the darker side of Nonsense in its concern with incongruity, and its link with estranged worlds, which yet resemble ours, places it at the centre of fantasy. Like fantasy too, it subverts accepted categories of the real and dares to look beyond the daylight world of clearly defined time, space and character to the irrational changing world of metamorphosis and the mask, which undermine a sense of integrated identity. Metamorphosis and the mask, however, can also suggest a terrifying fixity. In this sense, the central images are the puppet and the marionette, the transformation of the live being into the dead. For early man, the mask meant "the ecstatic fulfilment of his fantasy in flight from his uncertain existence," while "[t]he rhythmic movement of his body helped him to loosen his feelings and liberate him from his earth-boundness."¹¹³ In the paintings of James Ensor, however, the distinction between face and mask disappears -- both serve to convey a sense of grotesque estrangement of man from himself and from other men.

Peake's use of the grotesque seems to partake of both visions: that which implies the potential for positive growth and change, and that which sees the mask freezing on the face of a puppet. It is interesting to note that those characters who change are the ones for whom we feel more and more sympathy, while the fixed characters inspire extreme reactions of revulsion or horror, or a laughter tinged with unease. Kayser suggests that "[i]n the genuine grotesque the spectator becomes directly involved at some point where a specific meaning is attached to the events. In the humorous context, on the other hand, a certain distance is maintained throughout and, with it, a feeling of security and indifference."¹¹⁴ This last point is debatable. As Philip Thomson has pointed out, there is always an ambivalence in our response to the grotesque; we are always caught between the "tears" and the "strange laughter."¹¹⁵

As suggested earlier, Peake seems to have taken Dickens's "grotesque democracy" and transplanted it from the underworld of London to place of honour in Gormenghast. In doing so, he faces the problem of sustaining our interest in his creations as rounded characters who change and develop with the progress of the novel. Where David Copperfield should be seen to gain insight into himself

and his world as the novel proceeds, Uriah Heep can still, when the novel has come to an end, greet his visitors "with the old writhe." 116 The success with which Peake redeems his grotesques (and all of his characters are grotesque in one way or another) is also the success with which he "invoke[s] and subdue[s] the demonic," and it also suggests the extent to which the potential for change, which is one aspect of the grotesque, can lead to a creative relationship between character and setting.

Sepulchra reveals in an extreme form the debilitating effect of an unconscious, uncreative relationship with the Castle:

How could he love this place? He was a part of it. He could not imagine a world outside it; and the idea of loving Gormenghast would have shocked him. To have asked him of his feelings of his hereditary home would be like asking a man what his feelings were towards his own hand or his own throat. (p.62)

This is very like the animism of primitive cultures, an inability to perceive difference between the ego and the outer world, but instead of a sense of merging with something organic, Sepulchra's body is one with a stone labyrinth. The suppressed instincts to growth are perverted into nervous excitability when something happens to change the dull round, like the birth of his son, or to sombre and oppressive melancholia as all loses "its freshness or its heat upon the ritualistic table" (p. 64). It is of a piece with this melancholia that the Earl's only interest should be in his library and the talismanic knob of jade on his silver rod. Body and mind have reached a point of almost complete disjunction in him, and the outlet for his mind simply encourages his unhealthy introversion. As the Countess points out to herself, "what use are books to anyone whose days are like a rook's nest with every twig a duty" (p. 398). It is appropriate too that the library should be the last building to be used in the eastern wing, which "from the Tower of Flints onwards, was now but a procession of forgotten and desolate relics" (p. 203), and the only recognizable fragment on the facade is of "the lower part of a face" (p. 203), all that is above receding into the grey stones. The powers of the mind become attenuated rather than strengthened by the accumulation of useless and esoteric knowledge, and eventually the

library becomes a dark retreat in which to indulge inaction, dreams and nightmares. On Sepulchrave's knees is an unopened book, his mind moves over the recent birth of his son and something is roused in him, some need to reach out beyond himself, but the attempt fails and, after Nannie and the baby have visited him, we enter his mind once more: "He was too proud and too melancholy to unbend and be the father of the boy in anything but fact; he would not cease to isolate himself. . . . He sat back again in the chair, but he could not read" (pp. 230-231).

Having wandered in a world of abstraction for so long, Sepulchrave's mind is finally losing its hold on the concrete:

This evening, as he sat silently in the velvet-backed chair, his mind had turned to many subjects like a black craft, that though it steers through many waters has always beneath it a deathly image reflected among the waves. Philosophers and the poetry of Death -- the meaning of the stars and the nature of these dreams that haunted him when in those chloral hours before the dawn the laudanum built for him within his skull a tallow-coloured world of ghastly beauty. (p. 205)

As Satan craves the "swarming hues" of sin, so Sepulchrave, having eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, desires more knowledge, beyond words, the knowledge that is granted by drugs and madness and -- the ultimate form of knowledge -- death. His desire is grotesque in that it yearns for entry into the estranged world. This timeless link between dark knowledge and madness has been ably described by Michel Foucault:

No doubt, madness has something to do with the strange paths of knowledge. . . . But if knowledge is so important in madness, it is not because the latter can control the secrets of knowledge; on the contrary, madness is the punishment of a disorderly and useless science. If madness is the truth of knowledge, it is because knowledge is absurd, and instead of addressing itself to the great book of experience, loses its way in the dust of books and in idle debate; learning becomes madness through the very excess of false learning. 117

For Sepulchrave, the ship of fools on which he has sailed for such a long time becomes the ship of death, the "black craft." In

one sense, the burning of his library, that which represents the shielding from direct knowledge by means of symbolic verbal constructs, is a release for Sepulchrave. At this point the disjunction between the conscious responsive mind and the automaton is made most explicit:

His sensitive mind had ceased to function, for it had played so long in a world of abstract philosophies that this other world of practical and sudden action had deranged its structure. The ritual which his body had had to perform for fifty years had been no preparation for the unexpected. (p. 318)

There is a wonderful irony in the chapter entitled "Half-light" where we see Sepulchrave, freed from his books, turning to his daughter's love and the world of nature. Like Lear, he finds a new kind of wisdom in his madness, but unlike Lear he does not journey there and back again, to a restored balance between self and other, between innocence and knowledge. He becomes one with nature, through madness and violence seeking total identification with his totemic god, the owl, bird of evil and of wisdom: "I am not your father. . . . I live in the Tower of Flints. . . . I am the death-owl" (p. 348). The Earl refuses to acknowledge his life-giving capacity as father, refuses to play the role of a responsible social being. Oppressed by ritual since infancy, introspective by temperament, his rebellion finds shape in the ultimate retreat -- suicide. Lilian Feder, writing about Madness in Literature, sees an "inextricable connection between psychic experience and social conflict; the mad influence and sometimes rule the state; or, as prophet or suicide, they become its victims." ¹¹⁸ Sepulchrave, torn between the body that must obey and the mind that strives to be free, is symptomatic of the split identities that proliferate through the Castle. His search for reintegration through regression is seen in his reverie and at the moment of his death. The desire to return to the womb is made manifest: ". . . and there will be a darkness always and no other colour and the lights will be stifled away and the noises of my mind strangled among the thick soft plumes. . . and they will be there for ever for there can be no ending to the owls whose child I am" (p. 401). As he moves towards the Tower, he tells Flay, "This is the hour of my reincarnation" (p. 440), and the diabolically literal working

through of the Dionysiac rite is completed. ¹¹⁹

Because Sepulchrave's madness is such a powerful image of the effects of decayed ritual on a weak character, it becomes genuinely grotesque, not merely bizarre fantasy. Thus the sight of him sitting on the mantelpiece calling for mice is horrifying rather than ridiculous. The present tense of the passage gives it a violent immediacy, while the fact that we see him through the eyes of the devoted Flay, the compassionate Doctor and the distraught Fuchsia prevents us from reading the scene in any other than a sympathetic way.

Sepulchrave's unhappy marriage also suggests the sublimation of the sexual drive into desire for knowledge, emphasising the break between "blood-knowledge" and "mind-knowledge," and its final perversion into a desire for death. ¹²⁰ Gertrude is supremely indifferent to this. Her maternal instincts are abundantly satisfied by her birds and her cats, which, unlike the owls, are suggestive of the variety and airy vitality of nature on the one hand (note, for example, the extraordinary number of birds that perch on her at the Earling), and grace, intelligence, self-sufficiency and sophistication on the other. Unlike Sepulchrave's gloomy library, Gertrude's bedroom is as chaotic as a jungle with its mountains of wax, its ivy creeping through the window and its riot of red wallpaper. Like Sepulchrave, she fails to fulfil her role as a parent, in a human context at any rate, but her instincts are shown to be healthier than those of her husband. She speaks to and loves all the living world of nature, and this seems to result in a natural wisdom seen in her reverie and in the splendid way in which she rises to the occasion when the Castle is threatened. In her reverie we see her neglect of Titus qualified by a tender concern for his protection from the encroachment on his inner life that the Castle threatens. Her control over crisis situations reveals an awesome energy beneath her slumberous magnitude, an energy with which Sepulchrave is patently inadequate to cope. Again, the enormous Gertrude could easily become humorously grotesque, as her rear disappears through the library window, or as she is hoisted onto a stage. But there is too much slow dignity in her bearing and we see her too often from a mysterious distance, silent, eternal, surrounded by the white sea of cats or gloriously festooned by the birds. When we do see her in

close-up, as she calls her cats, we are told that "her eyes were like a child's; wide, sweet and excited" (p. 61).

What, then, are we to expect of Fuchsia, the "dusky daughter" (p. 402)? With her brooding face and her crimson dress, she combines the sombreness and melancholy of her father, and the energy and love for life of her mother. Her yearning for love first expresses itself in jealousy at the birth of her brother, and then in deep affection for him as she realizes that he is doomed to be as lonely as she. Her awareness of Nannie's frailty and care is often touching as she panders to the old lady's silliness, offering her hand to be smacked (p. 458). Fuchsia, ugly, gauche, passionate, romantic, imaginative, clearly reveals a capacity for making a rich and meaningful world for herself out of Gormenghast Castle. Peake's fondness for her is seen when he describes her "world away," the attic with its junk room, its theatre and the special secret loft with the paintings and the picture books.¹²¹ This secluded world is a veritable allegory of the creative process that takes chaos, structures it and so uses it "to think" (p. 71), to enrich the imaginative world in a dialectic that energizes inner and outer worlds. Nowhere does Peake state more explicitly the need for private worlds:

As Fuchsia climbed into the winding darkness her body was impregnated and made faint by a qualm as of green April. Her heart beat painfully.

This is a love that equals in its power the love of man for woman and reaches inwards as deeply. It is the love of a man or of a woman for their world. For the world of their centre where their lives burn genuinely and with a free flame. (p. 77)

The link between the sexual drive and the creativity of the artist, expressed here, is a link more fully explored in Gormenghast, where Titus moves towards artistic and sexual fulfilment. The vital question at the moment is whether or not Fuchsia and her creator can relate the private centres of their being to the centre of the world outside. For Fuchsia this centre of the world is Gormenghast. There is an interesting passage midway through the novel where Fuchsia, seeking in nature a compensation for the secret world which Steerpike has violated, finds him intruding once more. Up to this point, the landscape has been described in wasteland imagery: it is "desolate," with "large areas of swamp" and the "undulating darkness of the

Twisted Woods." There are "unkempt acres, broken here and there with low stunted trees bent by the winds into the shape of hunchbacks" (p. 272). Yet it is here that Fuchsia finds her beautiful roots, sunflowers, twigs and moss-covered stones, and when this world is threatened her heart leaps toward Gormenghast:

Behind him she saw something which by contrast with the alien, incalculable figure before her, was close and real. It was something which she understood, something which she could never do without, or be without, for it seemed as though it were her own self, her own body, at which she gazed and which lay so intimately upon the skyline. Gormenghast. The long, notched **outline** of her home. (p. 273)

Fuchsia's response in this passage suggests that inner and outer worlds might indeed be reconciled, but there is something inescapably adolescent about Fuchsia which the cunning Steerpike is easily able to manipulate -- her romantic daydreams:

'Someone will come then, if I live alone. Someone from another kind of world -- a new world -- not from this world, but someone who is different, and he will fall in love with me at once because I live alone and aren't like the other beastly things in this world, and he'll enjoy having me because of my pride.' (p. 146)

This sounds painfully like the frustrated daydreams of Irma, Cora and Clarice and, as with them, Steerpike appears on cue. Tutored by grief for her father and love for Titus, Nannie and the Doctor, who encourages her imagination with the bright red ruby ("Drink to the Coloured Things" p. 175), Fuchsia might stand a chance of transforming her life into something equally bright and beautiful: ". . . with how small a twist might she not suddenly have become beautiful," writes Peake (p. 51). But Steerpike intervenes, perverting the natural impulse to break free into life into a fascination with blaspheming her home, in Steerpike's irreverent terms, "the whole caboodle, bricks, guns and glory" (p. 49). To him the sun is "the old treacle bun" and the Countess "the old Bunch of Rags" (pp. 292-293). This childish meanness finds an echo in the selfish side of Fuchsia's nature, that which first led to her jealousy of her brother and her hatred of "all things": "I hate things! I hate all things! I hate and hate every single tiniest thing. I hate the

world" (p. 146).

There is, ultimately, very little of the grotesque in Fuchsia -- her ugliness, her shapeless red dress and her clumsy movements are made touching as we see her under greater and greater strain, as she is brought "face to face with so many forms of weirdness" (p. 347). To some extent, she is the emotionally involved child observer through whom we come face to face with weirdness. She frequently, if unconsciously, provides a perspective on events: Titus's birth, the final scene after the Christening, the Breakfast. Prunesquallor, her friend, presents the adult perspective. An outsider, not of the blood, he is particularly suited to this role, and it is interesting to note how he evolves from the ludicrous, tube-chested, thatch-haired freak of the spy-hole chapter, with his nervous hyena laugh and misplaced loquaciousness, his effete postures and magnified eyes, to the outstanding doctor, caring friend and, eventually, confidant to the Countess. His physical appearance never changes but his character develops until he becomes a fine example of how Peake is able to redeem the grotesque for our respect and admiration. Prunesquallor reaches a point of balance between his outsider status and his involvement with the Castle that makes him one of its most valuable inhabitants, so that Peake may write, towards the end of the novel:

. . . he was of the place and was a freak only in that his mind worked in a wide way, relating and correlating his thoughts so that his conclusions were often clear and accurate and nothing short of heresy. . . . He was no outsider -- and the tragedies that had occurred touched him upon the raw. (p. 470)

We see, too, how the Doctor's delight in Nonsense is his way of liberating himself from the narrow, self-centred, feeble-minded household Irma has created. This love of Nonsense also links him more strongly with Fuchsia, whose favourite picture book is almost a replica of Peake's book of verses entitled Rhymes Without Reason. This shared love reveals their ability to transcend the rigidly codified life of the Castle.

The insect-like Flay of the detonating knee joints is another character who is introduced to us in specifically Dickensian terms:

It did not look as though such a bony face as his could give normal utterance, but rather that instead of sounds, something more brittle, more ancient, something dryer would emerge, something perhaps more in the nature of a splinter or a fragment of stone. (p. 20)

Like Mr. Slaughterboard, however, Flay has another dimension: "His eyes were almost transparent as though in a country of ugly hills one were to find among the harsh rocks two sky-reflecting lakes" (p. 21). The natural images look forward to the way in which Flay will adapt to life in the world of trees and mountains, caves and lakes: "Nature, it seemed, was huge as Gormenghast," Flay discovers in a chapter suitably entitled "The Roses Were Stones" (p. 441). On the other hand, as Flay walks through the passages of Gormenghast, we are told that his voice "seemed a part of the cold narrow stairway of stone and iron" (p. 47), and his fanatical loyalty to Gormenghast eventually demands his life. His natural instincts disclose themselves in the way he steals some dates for Fuchsia, pockets some peaches from the breakfast table and carries Fuchsia to the Doctor after her father's breakdown. Fuchsia's affection for him is clearly meant to sanction our approval of him, as she rebukes Nannie for saying that they could do without him (p. 459). He suffers as acutely as Fuchsia does when Sepulchre goes mad, and it is that very suffering that, ironically, leads to his banishment, when he flings a cat at the sacrilegious Steerpike.

To see how the grotesque may be redeemed in one case and not in another, where distancing is meant to be prolonged, one need only look at the sustained contrast between Flay and Swelter. We are led, inevitably, to wish for Swelter's death in the titanic fight, for he has never become more than a vehicle for some superlatively grotesque images, very true to the Rabelaisian grotesque that enjoys degrading the body.¹²² When we first see Swelter, his size can only be apprehended in terms of volumes of light and darkness:

The long beams of sunlight, which were reflected from the moist walls in a shimmering haze, had pranked the chef's body with blotches of ghost-light. The effect from below was that of a dappled volume of warm vague whiteness and of a grey that dissolved into swamps of midnight -- of a volume that towered and dissolved among the rafters. (p. 33)

Where Flay's voice is like "the breaking of dry twigs" (p. 20), Swelter's comes "down from the shadows in huge wads of sound, or like the warm, sick notes of some prodigious mouldering bell of felt" (p. 34). Flay's voice forces its way out of his face, Swelter's drops out of his (pp. 20,34). Flay never smiles, but here is Swelter:

. . . across his face little billows of flesh ran swiftly here and there until, as though they had determined to adhere to the same impulse, they swept up into both oceans of soft cheek, leaving between them a vacuum, a gaping segment like a slice cut from a melon. (p. 103)

The oozing fat of Swelter's face, like his hand whose knuckles are so embedded in flesh that his knock cannot be heard (p. 363), is countered by the skeletal mask that is Flay's face, as he watches his enemy's murderous private ritual:

The light that seeped in a dull haze through the window dragged out as from a black canvas the main bone formation of Mr Flay's head, leaving the eye sockets, the hair, an area beneath the nose and lower lip, and everything that lay beneath the chin, as part of the night itself. It was a mask that hung in the darkness. (p. 208)

Flay is frequently silhouetted -- here, in the Stone Lanes, and, illuminated by lightning, as he confronts Swelter outside the Earl's door just before their fight.¹²³ Like the thin, hunched Steerpike, Flay hates Swelter; unlike him, he loves the Castle, and his association with shadow in these scenes may suggest that he is the benign counterpoint to the evil shadow that is Steerpike.¹²⁴ Flay also has Steerpike's hunter's ability, seen again in contrast to Swelter's:

If ever man stalked man, Flay stalked Swelter. It is to be doubted whether, when compared with the angular motions of Mr Flay, any man on earth could claim to stalk at all. He would have to do it with another word. . . .

If Mr Flay stalked, Mr Swelter insinuated. He insinuated himself through space. His body encroached, sleuth-like, from air-volume to air-volume, entering, filling and edging out of each in turn, the slow and vile belly preceding the horribly deliberate and potentially nimble progress of his fallen arches. (pp. 420-421)

In all these descriptions one is made aware of Peake's powers of observation, as well as his talent for translating sensual stimuli into verbal images. These images concretize the characters from as many perspectives as possible: speech, gesture, physical appearance. Michael Irwin draws attention to the fact that "the visual aspect of the characterisation may be merely a decorative extra, something to 'satisfy the curiosity of the reader'; or it may be vitally relevant to the moral and psychological aspects of the portrayal." He goes on to assert that "[t]he energy, stamina and consistency of imagination that are necessary to the creation of a strongly visual novel require, almost by definition, the stimulus of some larger purpose."¹²⁵ It seems fair to suggest, in the light of this comment, that Flay and Swelter represent aspects of the "larger purpose" of Mervyn Peake. The bony, ascetic Flay is entirely selfless and shows how his ability to merge with something greater than himself, the spirit of Gormenghast, fits him later for a heroic role that is part of the drama of renewal played out in the novels. Swelter's self-indulgence, on the contrary, figured in his revolting obesity, is of a piece with his self-glorification and intellectual vanity. Turning in on himself, he is finally destroyed.

Flay's final confrontation with his diametric opposite takes place in the moonlit, web-laced Hall of Spiders and anticipates the final clash between Flay's murderer, Steerpike, and Gormenghast's heir. It is a superbly staged battle with Peake adapting his beloved pirate stories to an epic scale:

As pirates in the hot brine-shallows wading, make, face to face, their comber-hindered lunges, sun-blind, fly-agonied, and browed with pearls, so here the timbers leaned, moonlight misled and the rank webs impeded. (p. 430)

But this is not a pirate story. The elaboration of syntax and imagery slows down the rhythm of the fight so that it takes on the quality of an archetypal struggle between good and evil, here seen in specific terms as a struggle between the regenerating grotesque, that leads to growth, love and harmonious variety, and the "frozen" grotesque, changeless, full of hatred, a gift to the blasphemous Tower of Flints.¹²⁶ Swelter's connection with the Tower is made

metaphorically: "Placed end to end his blood vessels might have coiled up the Tower of Flints and half way down again like a Virginia creeper -- a vampire's home from home" (p. 435). His identification with sea imagery also finds its climax here. When we first see him, he is like a lurching galleon.¹²⁷ At his death he becomes "more and more like something from the deeps where the grey twine-weed coils the sidling sea-cow" (p. 430) and, finally, we see him "floundering like a sea-monster" (p. 438), as he collapses into the flood water with Flay's sword protruding from his stomach like a mast. At this moment, the Earl's face emerges "in silver light": "Its eyes were circular and its mouth was opening, and as the lunar silence came down as though for ever in a vast white sheet, the long-drawn screech of a death-owl tore it, as though it had been calico, from end to end" (p. 439). The evil embodied in the grotesque Swelter (who becomes more trapped by monstrous metaphors rather than less so) becomes the gift to the owls. Swelter becomes the "black craft" of death as the mad moon shimmers above.

The cook is not the only example of the frozen grotesque, although he may be the most blood-curdling. The Twins, Irma and Nannie are also trapped within a hypertrophied monstrousness, which is, however, softened by the freedom of the laughter directed at Irma, and the pathetic pusillanimity associated with the Twins and Nannie.¹²⁸ Irma and the Twins are particularly good examples of Henri Bergson's rule for the cause of laughter:

Beneath the skin-deep harmony of form, the caricaturist divines the deep-seated recalcitrance of matter. He realizes disproportions and deformations which must have existed in nature as mere inclinations, but which have not succeeded in coming to a head, being held in check by a higher force. His art, which has a touch of the diabolical, raises up the demon who had been overthrown by the angel.¹²⁹

Irma is a domesticated demon, both funny and sad. The Twins are a slightly more complex case. Their vapid stares, dead voices and mindless fanaticism cause unease. Their slightly obscene pleasure in their fits suggests a particularly distasteful perversion of the sexual instinct.¹³⁰ On the other hand their private world is full

of colour -- embroidered rabbits, the wonderful Room of Roots, their bright purple dresses. In this sense, they are part of the Coloured Things to which the Doctor and Fuchsia drink, and they are connected to the Bright Carvers. Like the Bright Carvers, however, their art does not lead to an enrichment of life. No birds come to the Room of Roots, no-one comes to look at their embroidery. Their world is thus an image of the life-denying aspect of Gormenghast rather than an alternative to it. Their art is not a means to communication, but an end in itself, the expression of an inward-turning vanity. This vanity is stressed in one of their music-hall routines preceding the Dark Breakfast. Here, of course, they are very comical, but the touch of menace is present, and their single-minded devotion to power and glory makes them fair game for Steerpike's machinations:

'They'll look at us, you know,' says Cora flatly.
 'We're going to be looked at at the Breakfast.'
 'Because we're of the original blood,' says Clarice.
 'That's why.'
 'And that's why we're important, too.'
 'Two what?'
 'To everyone, of course.'
 'Well, we're not yet, not to everyone.'
 'But we will be soon.'
 'When the clever boy makes us. He can do anything.' . . .
 'Turn your head now, Cora. When I'm looked at at the Breakfast I want to know how they see me from the side and what exactly they are looking at; so turn your head for me and I will for you afterwards.' . . .
 'That's right, Cora. Stay like that. Just like that. Oh, Cora!' (the voice is still as flat), 'I am perfect.'
 She claps her hands mirthlessly, and even her palms meet with a dead sound. (pp. 384-385)

The terrifying narcissism of the sisters, conveyed here, will allow nothing to stand in its way and it destroys them as surely as Swelter's self-involvement destroys him.

It is Steerpike, the "clever boy," who focusses the ambiguity of response to the Castle. We have seen that for him the Castle is a place to be brought under control and manipulated to his megalomaniac ends. The sympathy we feel at the beginning of the novel for the lonely, angry, scared kitchen scullion, our admiration for his courage and tenacity, soon changes. Our response has already

been modified by our sight of his "greedy eyes" devouring the world of the Groans through the spy-hole. We become actively antagonistic as we see him exploit Fuchsia, and no greater condemnation could be pronounced by Peake, lover of "all things bright and beautiful," of strange private worlds, of clowns and freaks, than the following:

Steerpike had an unusual gift. It was to understand a subject without appreciating it. He was almost entirely cerebral in his approach. But this could not easily be perceived; so shrewdly, so surely he seemed to enter into the heart of whatever he wished, in his words or his deeds, to mimic. . . . He could not sink himself. He was not the artist. He was the exact imitation of one. (pp. 163-164)

It becomes evident that Steerpike is not representative of the fresh, exciting spirit of rebellion that will topple the old and institute a new order, notwithstanding the birth image that informs his climb from the bowels of the Castle to its roofs.¹³¹ He becomes, instead, the cool, cruel trickster, a cancerous growth on the Castle. His treatment of Irma and the Twins has the effect of increasing our sympathy for them, just as his mean, self-centred outlook places him, ironically, in the same class as Swelter. His intrusion into the private worlds of the Castle makes us see not only those worlds, but the Castle itself as something infinitely precious. The threat to the Castle's stability, instead of causing excitement, as one would have anticipated, having seen its crushing weight strangling life around it, causes apprehension of and, finally, hatred for that which threatens it.

Both Titus and Steerpike pose a threat to the Castle as it stands, but Titus's threat suggests the joyful rebirth of the seasons, the promise of the rainbow that the dead heat of summer will become the glorious apotheosis of the sun over a clean washed world. Steerpike's threat is that darkness, violence and madness will finally overcome all the worlds that constitute Gormenghast. Like Big Brother, he will be watching all through his spy-hole and the potential for reconciliation between private and public worlds will be non-existent, for there will only be his world, his dream of Gormenghast in which all the characters are merely painted toys.

Of course, Titus's role in this novel is largely symbolic and Gormenghast reveals that the contrasting threats they pose have more in common with each other, that Titus resembles Steerpike quite uncomfortably at times.

Steerpike's role in Titus Groan is already a fairly complex one. This is suggested by the following description:

His body gave the appearance of being malformed, but it would be difficult to say exactly what gave it this gibbous quality. Limb by limb it appeared that he was sound enough, but the sum of these several members accrued to an unexpectedly twisted total. His face was pale like clay and save for his eyes, masklike. These eyes were set very close together, and were small, dark red, and of startling concentration. (p. 127)

The combination of mask and malformation suggest that Steerpike is a clown figure, but his exploitation of the clown to manipulate Fuchsia marks him as the satanic clown rather than the sacred.¹³² The difficulty in pinning down his strangeness indicates his role as the diabolical shape-shifter whose identity can never be clearly defined, whose evil can never be fathomed. There are echoes of many deformed villains here -- Quilp, Uriah Heep, Mr. Hyde, Roger Chillingworth. But when he dons his black cloak and swordstick, with his pale face and burning eyes, he becomes a further distortion of the distorted Gothic hero, from Manfred, to Montoni, to Melmoth. In these characters we also find a sexual threat allied to a voracious ambition for total power over all.

We find Steerpike to be intelligent with a "gift of the gab" (p. 181). He is a quick learner and storer of information which might be useful: "There were few secrets hidden from him, for he had that scavenger-like faculty of acquiring unashamedly and from an infinite variety of sources, snatches of knowledge which he kept neatly at the back of his brain and used to his own advantage as opportunity offered" (p. 215). He is a polished flatterer and ladies' man, able to change masks to suit every contingency. He tells Fuchsia that he is "a dreamer and a man of action" and she believes him (p. 159). He looks at Irma so that "[i]t made her feel he realized she was not only a lady, but a woman" (p. 186). ". . . he's so clever and sometimes treats me with reverence which is due to me of

course for I'm Lady Cora of Gormenghast I am," muses that lady (p. 392). For Fuchsia, "[i]t was like watching someone from another world who was worked by another kind of machinery, by something smother, colder, harder, swifter. Her heart rebelled against the bloodlessness of his precision, but she had begun to watch him with a grudging admiration for a quality so alien to her own temperament" (p. 277). The ambivalence of Fuchsia's attitude is echoed by the quizzical response of the Doctor and the brooding but inarticulate suspicion of the Countess.¹³³

The "agility, resilience" and cunning of Steerpike seem to mark him out as formidable to the point of invincibility.¹³⁴ His words charm and amuse, his energy intrigues, his sharp wits and intelligence win even Barquentine's admiration. But the machine-like efficiency is not the full picture. It is one of the masks to wear in public, and already there are cracks to be seen. Steerpike's inability to navigate the Room of Roots is an image of his final inability to take full hold on the life of the Castle, to navigate, imaginatively, its labyrinths. He underestimates the manic power of the Twins, in spite of his awareness of the quality of the "incalculable" in their natures (p. 225). He fails to appreciate Fuchsia's capacity for love and loyalty, and thus cannot assess the reason for her running away from him after Sourdust's funeral. Most dangerous of all, however, is his lack of self-knowledge. He demonstrates an overweening confidence and concomitant complacency that constantly threaten to erupt in a kind of devilish joy. His control over his impulse "to crow" (p. 320) is very dubious, and loss of that control is the immediate cause of his end. As it is, Fuchsia is deeply disturbed by the expression on his face, seen through the skylight of the burning library, "a face framed with darkness within a few feet of her own. It sweated firelight, the crimson shadows shifting across it as the flames leapt in the room below. Only the eyes repelled the lurid air. Close-set as nostrils they were not so much eyes as narrow tunnels through which the Night was pouring" (p. 319). This scene is proleptic in two ways -- Fuchsia is overwhelmed by Steerpike's darkness, and Steerpike's mind finally gives way after his baptism of fire.¹³⁵

The insurgence of a manic glee, of the urge "to crow" has to be

carefully controlled when Fuchsia calls Steerpike to help the Earl, and the risk he runs with the Twins in the lake is amazing. After one of his most fiendish tricks, causing an "apparition" to terrorize the Twins, he returns to his room, and we read:

The window was a smoke-blue rectangle, intersected by black branches. He lit a lamp. The walls flared, and the window became black. The branches had disappeared. He drew the blinds. He kicked off his shoes and, springing on the bed, twisted himself onto his back and, for a moment, discarded his dignity and became, at least physically, a little more in keeping with his seventeen years; for he wriggled, arched his spine and stretched out his arms and legs with a terrible glee. Then he began to laugh and laugh, the tears pouring from his dark-red eyes until, utterly exhausted and helpless, he fell back upon the pillows and slept, his thin lips twisted.
(p. 483)

The mechanical control that Steerpike exerts over himself is finely captured in the taut, staccato rhythm of the first sentences of this passage. When the control breaks so does the simplicity of the syntax, and the rapid accumulation of clauses suggests the acceleration of a frenetic energy that finds expression in the wild and twisted laughter. Chesterton writes: "It has been suggested that all laughter had its origin in a sort of cruelty, in an exaltation over the pain or ignominy of an enemy: but it is very hard even for the most imaginative psychologist to believe that, when a baby bursts out laughing at the image of the cow jumping over the moon, he is really finding pleasure in the probability of the cow breaking her leg when she comes down again."¹³⁶ But that is exactly what Steerpike's laughter is -- destructive without the carnivalesque impulse to restore. Every action of his that takes place outside his involvement with Castle ritual is destructive: he burns the library, so contributing to the smashing of Sepulchrave's sanity; he destroys Fuchsia's attic world and then invades her natural world; he causes Flay to hurt a cat and, as a consequence, the Countess, and so destroys Flay's world; he invades and disrupts the worlds of Irma, the Doctor and the Twins. Thus the balance, from our perspective on Steerpike, is in favour of Castle ritual, which at least has as its motive the peace and order of a Castle community that, ironically, enables the luxury of private worlds.

Unless private and public ritual enter into a dynamic relationship with each other, however, one or the other will be doomed -- individuality crushed or anarchy loosed upon Gormenghast. Furthermore, unless the monstrousness of Gormenghast and the monstrousness of the characters are infused with the "grotesque realism" of folk culture, where grotesque means potential for growth and change in a lively, happy interplay of forms, the world of Titus Groan will be doomed to the "cosmic mockery" of Steerpiké's pale mask, twisted gargoyle grimace, hunched shoulders and mad red eyes.

Jacques Favier has suggested that for Peake "only the exaggerated is charged with meaning. The monstrous is not only indispensable, it is the sole bearer of sense, in the two accepted meanings of the word -- intellectual signification and sensory perception." ¹³⁷ So we return to the image of the circus and the freak show, estranged worlds, fantastic worlds in which we recognize ourselves in distorted form. Arthur Koestler likens caricature to the "distorting mirrors at fun-fairs, which reflect the human form elongated into a candle-shape, or absurdly compressed, or as a vague phantom with wavy outlines. As a result we see ourselves and yet something else; our familiar shapes being transformed as if the body were merely an elastic surface that can be stretched in all directions." ¹³⁸ This experience may be frightening; it may be funny. In its grotesqueness it is usually both. It suggests that there are other ways of seeing ourselves and our world. Gormenghast provides us with a hall of mirrors -- it presents us with a familiar, yet foreign image of our bureaucracy, our ceremonies, our institutions, and the satirical exaggeration forces fresh insights on us. The characters, too, are both familiar and foreign -- the religious fanatics and the Fascists, the rebel adolescent and the frustrated spinster, the mismatched mother and father. The grotesque dimension suggests more complex ways of seeing such characters.

Favier contends that

there is not a single principal character in the trilogy who is 'normal.' Each, by this excess or that, steps out of the ordinary, escapes from the traditional harmony which stereotypes heroic heroes just as much as it does the mediocre anti-heroes of everyday fiction. Each

takes on an aggressive relief, indeed a curious beauty, like the Poet who rants on, 'transformed by a sort of inner beauty' (TG p. 142). To quote Baudelaire, 'The beautiful is indeed always odd.' 139

Not all the characters take on "a curious beauty," but the reference to the Poet is an important one. For Thomas Hardy, the "province of the poet" was "to find beauty in ugliness." 140 In achieving this, he achieves his own beauty.

To quote Chesterton once more: "Many of us live publicly with featureless public puppets, images of the small public abstractions. It is when we pass our own private gate, and open our own secret door, that we step into the land of the giants." 141 What Peake has done in Titus Groan is to make that private world public and to show us our world in the distorting mirror that conceals a precious truth, the truth that for our culture to survive, the private world must enrich the public one and not become an atavistic retreat.

CHAPTER THREE : GORMENGHAST "LOST IN A FAMILIAR REALM"

Life's what I want -- the endless panoramas
Unfolding, like a book, page beyond page,
Of painted marvels -- the gold mountains sliding
Aside to show how forecasts of wild fruit
Sway at one's shoulder. ¹

Peake's second novel was written between 1946 and 1949, while the family was living in a spacious house called "Le Chalet" on the island of Sark. The island, treated with such tender interest and amusement in Mr Pye, was clearly a haven for Peake after the ordeal of the war, something of a retreat in space and time. It was there that he had spent a very happy two years (1933-1935) as a member of Eric and Lisl Drake's artists' colony. It had proved to be a time of physical and imaginative vitality, and successful exhibitions were combined with playing goalkeeper for the Sark soccer club. ² In returning there after the war with his wife and two sons (his daughter, Clare, was born on the island), Peake was able to recapture that sense of peace and spontaneous enjoyment in life. There were, however, constant reminders, especially financial, that a larger world existed outside the idyllic Channel Island and the movements between London and Sark were regular until the family finally returned to the metropolis at the end of 1949. ³

In Gormenghast, the Castle is very specifically representative of Sark. At one point Gertrude explains the topography to Titus: "You have been in the North Headstones beyond Gory and the Silver Mines. I know where you've been. You've been to the Twin Fingers where Little Sark begins and the Bluff narrows" (p. 458). It follows that, in this novel, the Castle as cherished symbol of security as well as source for adventure and discovery, should be central. London, the great, exciting, terrifying world, lies beyond, however, and the pull away from safety, the desire to follow adventure and discovery beyond the Castle walls is just as strong. The tension in Peake's life between an abandonment of the outside world, a retreat into the world of the family and the imagination, and the demands, both

pragmatic and artistic, of the outside world are transmuted, in Gormenghast, into a presentation of the tension felt in Titus between Gormenghast Castle and Gormenghast Mountain.

Of course, this transmutation cannot be seen in terms of a simple parallel. The outside world, the Mountain, in the novel is also representative of individual self-expression, of a break away from the public world with its rituals and sanctified spaces to the private world with its own precious rituals and secret spaces. Thus, the relationship between Castle and Mountain is not one of diametric opposites. Each is a source of regenerative discovery, each a source of fear and oppression. The tension between private and public selves that is central to Titus Groan is now specifically focussed in the conflict experienced by the growing Earl.

Where the mode of the first novel is best defined as mythic, that of the second comes much closer to epic and romance.⁴ In Titus Groan we are first introduced to a castle of magnificent dimensions and so old it seems as if it has always been there. It embodies the Gothic sense of the burden of the past that bears down on the present, the sense of terror and entrapment within the "webs of ritual" (GG,p.7). It symbolizes the guilt and desire of people drawn together only as public bodies, whose minds drift off into strange worlds, or who meet in the cause of violence and death. It is a static world where the need to escape from ritual is countered by the fear of change. The novel itself is structured by means of tableaux and set battles. It is a structure carefully defined by the material actuality of the spaces of the Castle: "The Hall of Bright Carvings," "The Great Kitchen," "The Stone Lanes," or by the rituals that impress on the denizens the sanctity of these spaces: "Assemblage," "The Dark Breakfast," "The Earling." Action is dream-like and time is seen to turn back on itself so that it appears to stand still. Eternal repetition, eternal return, the world of myth that is sanctioned by "illud tempus."⁵

In the world of romance, however, the focus is not so much on the setting as on the central figure, the hero, and the emphasis on sequence, action and climax is much stronger. The hero is adventurous and faces the challenge of the quest.⁶ He slays the dragon and finds the buried treasure, restoring fertility to the land. In this sense Gormenghast is structured according to romance formulas, and its

numerical chapter headings point to the emphasis on sequence. The novel also deals with the potential for change: the climactic struggle between Titus and Steerpike does not lead to a happy re-establishment of order with the Earl leading his community, for Titus, like many Romantic heroes, is a hero in transition. Walter Reed describes the Romantic hero as one who experiences "an inner tension between the uniqueness of the actual self and the typicality of the heroic role. . . . The Romantic hero is within himself historical, either aspiring or declining, either in the process of becoming a hero or in the process of outliving a heroic role that is increasingly difficult to maintain." ⁷ In Gormenghast, we see Titus both becoming a hero and outliving the heroic role. The stress on becoming, on process also places the novel in the tradition of the Bildungsroman. To quote Reed once more: "The whole genre of the Bildungsroman. . . can be seen as an outgrowth of the Romantic meditation on the hero, a genre that emphasises the emerging substance more than the traditional form but that preserves the old heroic gestalt in the imaginative background." ⁸ For Herman Servotte, this is the most obvious reading:

Titus's evolution is. . . typical of every man's development. Wanting to become himself, man breaks away from the bondage of tradition, but in the process he loses the security of childhood. He wants to create the world anew and soon realizes that he carries the heritage of his ancestors in his blood; he cannot begin ab ovo. In the process of growing up he discovers his childhood as something "more distant than the stars and nearer than the eye" (T.S. Eliot); it belongs to him and yet it escapes him. Or, to formulate this differently, he is at the time himself and another, the man he has made himself into by his own decisions, and the man he was made into under the weight of his biological and cultural inheritance. ⁹

Servotte takes us beyond Gormenghast into Titus Alone, but the tension he describes here between the independent creating individual and the created pattern of which he is a part is given serious and extended treatment in the novel at present under discussion.

As Bildungsroman, Gormenghast deals in some detail with Titus's education, both formal and informal. The Professors, the source of Titus's formal education, become central characters in the novel, and Nature, the source of his Wordsworthian experiences, plays a very

important role. It is through these two aspects -- School and Nature -- that we are able to focus on the conflict in Titus between comfort and the quest, or what Philip Wheelright sees as "man's primal relationship with nature," a "tendency toward association by complementaries, or opposites":

The typically primitive attitude toward nature is largely a tension between familiarity and watchfulness. The former gives stability and confidence, a feeling of membership, of at-homeness, of being comfortably rooted in Mother Earth. . . . But the familiar is not all of life, and to bask in it exclusively is to approach the condition of vegetable. Man encounters also, and develops a readiness to encounter, the strange; and this readiness in turn has a double aspect. For the strange can alarm and it can fascinate: it is likely to do both at once, and the two emotions in combination -- terror subdued by wonder -- produces awe. . . . Where the note of alarm predominates. . . man's imaginative awareness falls into a primal terror of the strange as such, i.e. of the Wholly Other. . . . Effective defense against alien reality is communal; only where there is vigorous imaginative independence combined with tough moral courage can it be individual. 10

If Titus is to leave his home and survive he must, then, show "imaginative independence" and "tough moral courage"; he must be "a dreamer and a man of action" whose aim is "the synthesis of the self." ¹¹ Steerpike describes himself as "a dreamer and a man of action" (TG, p.159), but he proceeds to travesty the image of the artist-hero and, far from achieving an integration of being, we see him torn apart by madness. The extent to which Titus manages to achieve this integration must now be examined.

Where Titus's role in the first novel is largely symbolic, suggesting a new order, in the second novel he is immediately presented to us as an individual and, more importantly, as a child, who promises new beginnings, spontaneous responses, innocent energy and vitality. The first two chapters are an elaborately stylized invocation to the characters of Gormenghast. "Let them appear," says the author (p.8), in the overt role of creator of this universe. It is made clear that the significance of the characters as individuals is once more subordinated, not so much to the presence of the Castle as to the presence of Titus. They are called forth, for "Titus himself is meaningless without them, for in his infancy he fed on

footsteps, on the patterns that figures made against high ceilings, their hazy outlines, their slow or rapid movements, their varying odours and voices" (p.11). Similarly, the Castle is significant in this book, not because of its inherent value, but because it is the setting for Titus's growth. So, from the beginning, Titus is at once individual and part of a community and two kinds of ritual are at war within him, the ritual of the shadows and the "ritual of the blood" (p.7). Because he is "first blood" (TG,p.97), this conflict will be even more intense:

A ritual, more compelling than ever man devised, is fighting anchored darkness. A ritual of the blood; of the jumping blood. . . .

The gift of the bright blood. Of blood that laughs when the tenets mutter 'Weep.' Of blood that mourns when the sere laws croak 'Rejoice!' O little revolution in great shades! (p.7)

The repetition of "blood," the lack of verbs and the antonymic structuring serve to create a sense of incantatory power to challenge the liturgy of the Christening. There is an ironic implication here: there is no escape from ritual, be it man-made or the timeless ritual of the natural impulses. It is for Titus, eventually, to fuse the two kinds of ritual. This fusion is hinted at metaphorically in the following passage:

He has learned an alphabet of arch and aisle: the language of dim stairs and moth-hung rafters. Great halls are his dim playgrounds: his fields are quadrangles: his trees are pillars. (p.7)

The passage stresses the two kinds of education to which Titus will have to submit himself. He will discover that fields and trees are separate from quadrangles and pillars and that, to achieve integration, a conscious and imaginative effort must be made. Furthermore, his understanding of the concepts of "alphabet" and "language" must be developed before he can communicate with his world.

Roland Barthes has attacked myth in terms of the way it deceives people into believing that its language is based on natural truth.¹² "Ancient or not," he asserts, "mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history

it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things" (p.110). Myth appropriates language to its own ends and becomes "a frozen speech," which "suspends itself, turns away and assumes the look of a generality: it stiffens, it makes itself look neutral and innocent" (p.125). This "naturalization" (p.129) of a created reality makes of myth a "depoliticized speech" (p.142): "Semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal. . . . myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made" (p.142). Barthes contends that there is "one language which is not mythical, it is the language of man as a producer: wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image, wherever he links his language to the making of things, meta-language is referred to a language object, and myth is impossible" (p.146). It follows that Revolution cannot make use of myth, for "Revolution is defined as a cathartic act meant to reveal the political load of the world: it makes the world; and its language, all of it, is functionally absorbed in this making" (p.146).

In the light of this, Titus, as a "little revolution in great shades," must learn a new language, one that defies the idea that "Things are so because they are so" and reveals that "Things are so because, long ago, someone made them so and, because of this, someone else may re-make them differently." ¹³ There is an analogy between Titus's role and the role of the fantasist, who sees in realism simply a convention that has been "made" and which blots out whole areas of human experience.

Titus's formal initiation into the world of Gormenghast is to be effected, partly, by the School and its motley crew of Professors. From them and from the daily rituals he is to learn the "alphabet of arch and aisle." The importance of the Professors is established in the third chapter:

About the rough margins of the castle life -- margins irregular as the coastline of a squall-rent island, there were characters that stood or moved gradually to the central hub. They were wading out of the tides of limitless negation -- the timeless, opaque waters. Yet what are these that set foot on the cold beach? Surely so portentous an

expanse should unburden itself of gods at least;
scaled kings, or creatures whose outstretched wings
might darken two horizons. Or dappled Satan with his
brow of brass.

But no. There were no scales or wings at all.

It was too dark to see them where they waded; although
a blotch of shadow, too big for a single figure, augured
the approach of that hoary band of Professors, through
whose hands for a while Titus will have to wriggle. (pp.14-15)

The sea image is central to this novel which deals with the emergence of Titus from a state of unconsciousness -- "And Titus Groan is wading through his boyhood," we are told later (p.338). The Professors move towards "the central hub," and the phrase suggests a wheel, thus emphasising the cycles of nature and the endless repetition of the life of the Castle, out of which Titus, like Rasselas, wants to break.¹⁴ Titus's formal education is thus clearly associated with the life and nature of the Castle. It is not intended to encourage individuality but strict conformity, an unthinking submission to the Laws: "It was for the professors to suffer no change. To eye the scaling paint, the rusting pen-nib, the sculpted desk lid, with understanding and approval" (p.119). Thus, Barquentine's edict demands that "a sense of the customs, traditions and observances -- and above all, a sense of the duties attached to every branch of the Castle's life -- be instilled and an indelible sense of the responsibilities which will become his when he attains his majority. . . ." (p.66). Gormenghast's approach to education is very much in keeping with a ritual- and myth-bound society. In The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology, Joseph Campbell describes this approach as follows:

One is linked to one's adult role. . . by being identified with a myth -- participating actually, physically, oneself, in a manifestation of mythological forms, these being visibly supplied by the roles and patterns of the rite, and the rite, in extension, supporting the form of the society. So that, in sum, we may say that whereas the energies of the psyche in their primary context of infantile concerns are directed to the crude ends of individual pleasure and power, in the rituals of initiation they are reorganized and implicated in a system of social duty, with such effect that the individual thenceforth can be safely trusted as an organ of the group.¹⁵

The seriousness with which we treat the Professors, as those who must make Titus an "organ of the group," is considerably modified by the mock-mythic resonance of this passage:

As the professors moved like a black, hydra-headed dragon with a hundred flapping wings, it might have been noticed that for all the sinister quality of the monster's upper half, yet in its numerous legs there was a certain gaiety. (p.119)

Insofar as the Professors are like a sinister dragon, they have to be slain. Insofar as they reveal a joy in "the secret air of their demesne" (p.120), they are to be treated with affection. For them too, there is the need for a private world which wins an intuitive response, whose private rituals (the donning of red gowns, the tossing away of mortar-boards) counter the chant to "Hold fast / To the law / Of the last / Cold tome" (p.129). The mixed attitude to the Professors is an image of the ambivalence with which the Castle as a whole is treated in Gormenghast.

When we are introduced to the Professors individually, we find that, however enjoyable they may be as caricatures, it is quite apparent that they are not likely to stimulate the imagination of a young, rebellious and growing boy. Of course, it is also a moot point whether they have sufficient energy or sense of purpose to mould Titus according to the laws of the Castle. The sea image associated with the Professors is sustained in a slightly different form as we enter "the vile subterranean light" of the "umber tomb" that is the Professors' Common-room: "To enter the room from the Professors' corridor was to suffer an extraordinary change of atmosphere, no less sudden than if a swimmer in clear white water were suddenly to find himself struggling to keep afloat in a bay of soup" (p.51). The Professors are shown to be a mixture of the superficial and frivolous (Cutflower), the apathetic and self-indulgent (Opus Fluke), the earnest but muddle-headed (Flannelcat) and the dilettantes (Shred and Shrivell, amusing parodies of literary criticism and psychoanalysis).

The chaos of the Common-room is, at least, an energetic contrast to the image of the Headmaster, whose system of delegation is so successful that he need do nothing but be and there seems to be some

doubt as to whether he even accomplishes this: "If ever there was a primogenital figure-head or cipher, that archetype had been resurrected in the shape of Deadyawn. He was pure symbol" (p.57), like the blank pages of the second tome of the Law. He is also like the old philosopher and represents a bland negation of life. Deadyawn, with his face "naked in its vacancy" (p.63) is, as his name suggests, in a constant state of half sleep, desiring nothing more than to be wheeled "into. . . the. . . soft. . . darkness. . ." which is also, for him, "the. . . golden. . . void" (p.69). The philosopher also subscribes to this vision of the void and assures the angry young man that "death is life. It is only living that is lifeless" and asks, "Have you not seen them coming over the hills at dusk, the angels of eternity?" (p.75). Sepulchrave has already demonstrated the danger of getting lost among abstractions, and it is for his son to challenge the life-negating powers of the Professors, the Headmaster and the philosopher, to burn beards metaphorically, where the angry young man and Steerpike burn them literally. Steerpike's burning of Barquentine's beard is, however, of a different order of destruction from the burning of the philosopher's. It is in the service of his own death-orientated power-lust, rather than in the service of "the green grass" that Titus calls for (p.397).

Deadyawn's death is maliciously appropriate. We are introduced to the "great, dreamy hall" (p.105), where the schoolboys are acting out a ritual of their own, demonstrating the original link between play and ritual. Theirs is a ritual "[t]oo rapid, too vital, too dangerous for any dance or ballet. Yet as traditional and as filled with subtleties. . . . It had a rhythm of its own, this hazardous, barbaric, yet ceremonial game -- a ritual as unquestioned and sacrosanct as anything could be in the soul of a boy" (pp.107-109). This game of daring and potential death sets the tone for Deadyawn's actual death. The play-ritual of the boys transports us to a carnival world. It is literally an alternative world to the desks and dusty windows of the classroom, a world in which the mundane fear of danger and death is mocked at, challenged, overcome. The classroom emphasis on the static digestion of abstractions is overturned by the intense vitality, the acute consciousness of life that, paradoxically, is felt most surely in the presence of death. Thus, Edith Kern can assert that "[i]n the realm of the absolute comic, even violence and death may

evoke laughter, whereas they will make us weep when presented in the idiom of the tragic." ¹⁶ Laughter rather than terror is the keynote of Deadyawn's grotesque death, as he unintentionally imitates the acrobatics of the boys:

The soft, imponderable, flaccid Deadyawn, that arch-symbol of delegated duties, of negation and apathy, appeared now that he was upside down to have more life in him than he had ever had before. His limbs, stiffened in the death-spasm, were positively muscular. His crushed skull appeared to balance a body that had suddenly perceived its reason for living. (p.113)

The philosopher's paradox is justified, if not quite in the way that he intended, for the criticism levelled here is not at life, but at those who deny it to such an extent that death does indeed seem more vital. The leap of Fly out of the window completes the macabre travesty of the boys' balletic ritual.

If the School and its formal educational programmes are inadequate to help Titus grow, it follows that he will have to turn to other sources. Although we are told that Titus takes part in the rituals of schoolboy life, we are never actually shown this. ¹⁷ What we do see is Titus rebelling alone, finding his own secret worlds. We see this early in the novel when, instead of riding beneath the southern walls, he turns his horse back into the Castle. The timelessness and dreamy silence of the Castle are delicately conveyed: "There was no sign that any living thing had ever moved or breathed between the plaster walls, or that the many doors had ever opened, save that a small whitish flower lay in the dust beneath the rusting helmet, and that a door was swinging gently to and fro" (p.18). The sense of a tender age that has just passed by, of an age of romance and chivalry that has left its breath in the echoing halls is a fit prelude to the entrance of Titus astride his pony. We are not given much more than an impression of him here, but it is an important one -- he is destined to be a hero in a romance, for he has the courage to break with traditions and to stand alone, yet he is clearly related to the Castle by "a certain scale about him, as though his height and breadth bore no relation to the logic of feet and inches" (p.20). His scale is likened to his mother's and she is more and more strongly identified with the Castle. "The Castle throws

you out," she had said to Flay (TG,p.378).

Back in class, Titus's mind wanders away from mathematics to a world of "swopped marbles, birds' eggs, wooden daggers, secrets and catapults, midnight feasts, heroes, deadly rivalries and desperate friendships" (p.21). Titus's dual identity as heroic earl and ordinary schoolboy is thus captured in the first scene. The next two important scenes pursue this dichotomy.

In chapter nine, Titus discovers "an all but forgotten landing" which has been "taken over for many a decade by succeeding generations of dove-grey mice" (p.49). Again, there is the sense of a lost age, a time when innovation was not foreign to Gormenghast, when the Carvers were not the only ones to express themselves by means of bright colours. Colour as colour dominates here -- crimson floorboards, yellow walls, apple-green and azure banisters -- and is transformed into an unearthly world by the sunlight, "whose beams made of this silent, forgotten landing a cosmos, a firmament of moving motes, brilliantly illumined, an astral and at the same time a solar province; for the sun would come through with its long rays and the rays would be dancing with stars. Where the sunbeams struck, the floor would flower like a rose, a wall break out in crocus-light, and the banisters would flame like rings of coloured snakes" (p.49). The colours on their own have faded and decayed, but with the natural light they are metamorphosed into flowers and animals. It is a beautiful image of the relationship between art and nature, between the private world and the world of natural creation. Titus comes upon "this old circus-ground of bygone colours" (p.49), after having traversed the desolate halls beneath, where the only thing the sun can illuminate is the dust. The feeling that invisible presences have just left or are just entering the halls echoes the image of the swinging door in the previous scene and emphasises Titus's sense of being a transitory creature in a space that does not belong to him. The joy with which he takes hold of the coloured balcony is therefore understandable as a declaration of possession of a secret world into which no-one may intrude, just as Fuchsia's attic is hers, until Steerpike violates it.

Like Steerpike, Titus has been exploring the Castle and, like him, he is taking possession of it through courage and tenacity (his fear of the golden silences does not prevent him from climbing the

staircase). Unlike Steerpike, however, he takes possession in response to delight in the beauty of the place and the sense of comfort and friendship it imparts to him. He gives himself up to it as much as he lays claim to it and there is no suggestion of exploitation, unless the enjoyment of beauty be exploitation:

The atmosphere was indescribably golden and friendly to the boy: so friendly that his proximity to the hollow room below him did little to disturb his delight. He sat down, his back against a yellow wall, and watched the white motes manoeuvring in the long sunbeams.

'This is mine! mine!' he said aloud. 'I found it.'
(p.50)

Titus's words convey the idea that he can only enter into his stronghold through an act of exploration that is both physical and imaginative. Physical exploration leads to the coloured balcony, to which his imagination then responds, and the response is both that of a happy little boy and an Earl aware that Gormenghast is his, but feeling that this is only a reality insofar as he makes it so. When he says, "This is mine!" he "makes the world." This simple, creative entry into the world of Gormenghast may be compared with the image we have of Steerpike's elaborately contrived system of spy-holes, which looks back to his first sight of the Groans. The splendid climb across the roofs has become a cramped and puerile squinting into people's bedrooms and suggests Steerpike's increasingly narrow perspective on the Castle which leads to an increasing failure to estimate its power and the nature of its inhabitants.

Later, Titus's fascination with colour becomes a conscious attempt to take hold of the worlds of the imagination. Colour is seen, not as something separate and abstract, but as a tool of the unifying imagination. The bluebottles, the buzzing of the flies, the room that "swam in a honey-coloured milky-way of motes" (p.83) create the wistful atmosphere of the balcony and of the "great, dreamy hall," but here the alternative world is an internalized response to the stimuli of ink, maps, the desk, the pen and, finally, the marble. The books become "coloured rectangles of pale, washed-out blue or laurel green" (p.83). The marble, similarly, becomes more than something to shoot across the floor, however exciting and important that may be. Titus feels the marble, and concentrates on one colour,

red, which he associates with a room of red (like his mother's?), a drop of blood, his beating heart, battle clouds, Indians, the sun, pirates, the vast eye of the central buccaneer, his mother's hair, Fuchsia's ruby. Thus, physical sensations, his own history, his favourite stories all merge in the images produced by the action of his mind on the "globe": "It was the world, and suddenly like the world it rolled. And as it rolled it grew yet again, until there was nothing but the pupil, filling the consciousness; and in that midnight pupil Titus saw the reflection of himself peering forward" (p.86). The self-consciousness of the artist who watches himself in the act of creating a world is contained in this image. It is also an image of Titus becoming conscious of himself as a complex being, one who feels, remembers and creates, one whose mind can range over vast regions defying the boundaries between the real (Fuchsia's ruby) and the unreal (the "treeless desert" of the "yellow world" p.86). The unreal might simply be the unknown that exists beyond Gormenghast Mountain.

In a radio talk entitled As I See It, recorded in 1947, while he would have been busy working on Gormenghast, Peake stated explicitly what he has Titus experience imaginatively:

They say there is enough to last a man a lifetime in the study of, say, an acorn; (there is the definition of a specialist as the man who discovers more and more about less and less). But specialization seems to me to be a sterile thing unless, to return to the acorn, the specialist himself expands as he shrivels -- breaks his bonds and perceives in the acorn not only the oak but the whole vegetable universe, and in the whole vegetable universe the vital source of all things, and in this matrix, a god -- perhaps of beauty, or sublime indifference -- at any rate, a god.

As I see it, or as I want to see it, the marvels of the visible world are not things in themselves but revelations to stir the imagination -- to conduct us to amazing climates of the mind, which climates it is for the artist to translate into paint or into words. When I say the marvel of the physical world, I do not mean to curtain off the sordid, the horrific, the ghastly. The world includes the whole physical and spiritual alphabet from the A of distilled glory to the Z of vileness. 18

It is this alphabet that Titus has to learn, and, as he rushes out of the classroom in search of "the talons of adventure, the antlers of

romance" (p.87), he little realizes how soon they will come his way.

Titus's first serious act of rebellion against the Law takes place in chapter fifteen, when he decides not to return to the Castle, but to answer the challenge of the Mountain instead. The seriousness lies not so much in his not returning to school, but in the reasons for his refusal. He experiences the first conscious stirrings of a desire to find significance beyond the Castle walls, both physically and imaginatively. For Carl Jung, "[t]he mountain stands for the goal of the pilgrimage and ascent, hence it often has the psychological meaning of the self."¹⁹ Thus Titus's ascent up the Mountain may be seen as an ascent out of the cocoon of safety that the Castle provides, out of the irresponsibility of childhood and into an awareness of the risks and responsibility that conscious living entails.

The passage opens with a play of light on the forest and thus recalls the scene on the coloured balcony. Both the man-made and the natural worlds are warmed into life by the sunlight, thus defying any straightforward contrast between Castle and Nature. Indeed, at the beginning of the novel we are presented with a description of the Castle that contrasts interestingly with an earlier passage in Titus Groan where we see "momentary motions" that "fluttered and died" around Gormenghast (TG, p.497). In the sequel, the author asks the question: "Is all corroding?" and replies, "No. Through an avenue of spires a zephyr floats; a bird whistles; a freshet bears away from a choked river. Deep in a fist of stone a doll's hand wriggles, warm rebellious on the frozen palm" (p.7). The natural world is capable of infusing the Castle as much as it breathes vitality into the slopes of the Mountain. The implication is that Castle and Mountain interact dynamically and Titus needs both.

A quest cannot start from a vacuum; it must start from a context and for Titus that context is the Castle with all its mythic resonance. Northrop Frye has expressed this dilemma succinctly: "It is quite true that if there is no sense that the mythological universe is a human creation, man can never get free of servile anxieties and superstitions, never surpass himself, in Nietzsche's phrase. But if there is no sense that it is also something uncreated, something coming from elsewhere, man remains a Narcissus staring at his own

reflection, equally unable to surpass himself." ²⁰ Titus's experience on the Mountain dramatizes his need for an "uncreated" Gormenghast, that has always been there and for the Gormenghast that is subject to the will of the creating mind. Barthes' attack on myth as the created passing itself off as the inevitable needs to be balanced by a restoration of the sanctity of myth as something life-enhancing. Destruction is valuable only insofar as it leads to vital re-creation. In George MacDonald's words: "In the grand process of existence, destruction is one of the phases of creation; for the inferior must ever be giving way for the growth of the superior: the husk must crumble and decay, that the seed may germinate and appear." ²¹

Similarly, the fantasist does not pretend to create out of the void; he creates, suggested Mary Shelley, "out of chaos." ²² He acknowledges what has always been there and then proceeds to question and explore it, re-creating it in the sense of seeing it and naming it anew. Rollo May has this to say about the relationship between man and his world:

We love and will the world as an immediate, spontaneous totality. We will the world, create it by our decision, our fiat, our choice; and we love it, give it affect, energy, power to love and change us as we mold and change it. This is what it means to be fully related to one's world. I do not imply that the world does not exist before we love or will it; one can answer that question only on the basis of his assumptions, and, being a mid-westerner with inbred realism, I would assume that it does exist. But it has no reality, no relation to me, as I have no effect upon it; I move as in a dream, vaguely and without viable contact. ²³

This seems to be an eminently sensible approach. In the context of the novel, Gormenghast is there and its mythic significance is real, but only valuable insofar as Titus makes it so, and this he can only do by separating himself from it, questioning it, even rejecting it, in order to see it more fully and, so, to see himself more fully. Jung expresses the point in this way: "Identity does not make consciousness possible; it is only separation, detachment and agonizing confrontation through opposition that produce consciousness and insight." ²⁴

It is significant that the third point of light on the landscape

into which Titus is moving is like a "coruscating heart of tares on fire" (p.96), suggesting purgation. As Titus enters the sunlight, the world becomes brighter and brighter until "from skyline to skyline, the world was naked light" (p.97). As Steerpike had once smiled to see the roofscape (TG, p.129), so Titus shouts to see the sunlit landscape, and responds to the Mountain's dare to defy the "webs of ritual": "'Do you dare?' it seemed to cry. 'Do you dare?'" (p.97). The words echo Gertrude's as she broods on the threat to the Castle: "Who would dare to rebel? Who would dare?" (p.44). Thus, the conflict is heightened and the suggestion is there that Titus and Steerpike are inverted images of each other. As Titus struggles with his feelings, the outer landscape becomes an image of the inner, mental landscape:

. . . a rare confusion of voices and images had made a cockpit of his panting body. Forests as wet and green as romance itself heaved their thorned branches through him as he sat there shuddering, half turned on the saddle. Swathes of wet foliage shuffled beneath his ribs. In his mouth he tasted the bitterness of leaves. The smell of the forest earth, black with rotted ferns and pungent with fermentation, burned for a moment in his nostrils.
(p.97)

The forest is perceived entirely in terms of Titus's romantic imagination and his physical responses. Yet, the heavy lushness of the forest cannot fail to recall Gertrude, the archetypal Mother Earth figure, and the complexity of the relationship between the world of Gormenghast and the world outside Gormenghast, between Titus's "citylike home" (p.96) and "the shadowy woods" (p.97) is stressed. Titus moves from womb to womb, but there is a crucial difference in that his emergence from the womb of the mother leads to what Paul Zweig, following Bettelheim, calls a "masculine birth."²⁵ In adventuring forth into the forest on the masculine mountain, with its "clawlike peak" (p.97), Titus is initiated as "a child of his own deeds" in the "unconfined spaces where he can perpetually create and recreate his own beginnings."²⁶

For Titus at the moment, these "unconfined spaces" are of necessity limited to "the wild vista that surrounded Gormenghast" (p.99). Gormenghast is still the dominating presence and it is only later that he will answer the Mountain's challenge fully by venturing out beyond

the furthest boundary of this "island of maroons set in desolate water beyond all trade-routes" (p.99) to become Titus Alone. The world of romance into which he enters now still partakes of "faery lands forlorn," of legend and archaic images, of the knight-errant setting off through forests of magic.²⁷ This sense of the *prymaeval* relates the romance offered by the Mountain to the sense of age and tradition of the Castle, to the "small whitish flower" and the "rusting helmet" (p.18). Both the forest of the Mountain and the Castle are part of a heroic world, held together by faith in the sanctity of age and the Law of myth, ritual, the Stones, be they the stones of Castle or Mountain:

He knew no other world. Here all about him the raw material burned: the properties and settings of romance. Romance that is passionate; obscure and sexless: that is dangerous and arrogant.

The future lay before him with its endless ritual and pedantry, but something beat in his throat and he rebelled.

To be a truant! A Truant! It was like being a Conqueror -- or a Demon. (p.99)

Titus's adventurous spirit is contained within the boundaries of what he knows to be "the land of his ancestors" (p.97). This is not meant to reduce the importance of his experience in the forest. It is something illuminating and liberating in a very profound way, but should be seen in the context of a series of initiations, a process of continual becoming.

The kind of initiation suggested in the above passage is clearly pre-pubescent, and Titus's excitement is that of the child who runs away from home with the unconscious knowledge that it is there for him to return to. At this point he is Tom Sawyer rather than Huck Finn, and the way in which he glamorizes danger is seen in the way the word "truant" becomes "Truant." The word specifically denotes a child, but in Titus's imagination the "Truant" becomes a heroic figure.²⁸ The irony contained in the free indirect mode is gentle but persistent: "It was like being a Conqueror -- or a Demon." This sentence also conveys the ambiguous way in which Titus's rebellion is presented and the conflict of roles he experiences: is he the epic hero protecting the community, or the demonic individual who, in Romantic tradition, liberates himself from the community? Titus's

conflicting impulses are dramatized by the unpredictable changes in the light and the weather, opposite sensations pursuing each other until vapour surrounds the child and he has to force himself on to the ascent of the Mountain. The impression of psychological growth, even in this short space of time, is conveyed by the way in which Titus responds to two views of the Castle. On the first occasion he emerges from the obscurity of the gloomy clouds, on the second from the forest mists. After traversing the mire and the branches that attack him, he sees "the shining stone of one of the Castle's western capes"(p.99) and he responds to the sight with childish arrogance and defiance. This is a backward-looking reaction against the Castle, rather than a forward-looking eagerness:

For a moment so huge a sense of himself swam inside Titus as to make the figures in the castle like puppets in his imagination. He would pull them up in one hand and drop them into the moat when he returned -- if he returned. He would not be their slave any more! Who was he to be told to go to school: to attend this and to attend that? He was not only the 77th Earl of Gormenghast, he was Titus Groan in his own right.

'All right, then!' he shouted to himself, 'I'll show them!'
(p.100)

The destructive impulse contained here, the overweening ego that usurps the identities of the characters for its own personal glory, that attempts to overthrow the consecrated and mythic control of the Castle, brings Titus perilously close to the Steerpike who slides into Gormenghast "like a snake into a rock" (p.446). This power-lust is countered by the feeling of solitude that follows, as Titus climbs up through the vapour: "When the sun shone down again unhindered and the highest wisps of the mist were coiling some distance below, Titus realized in full what it was to be alone. The solitude was of a kind he had never experienced before" (p.101). The meaning of "aloneness" has to be continually qualified by Titus, but relative to his prior experience, his solitude here, surrounded by the silent white tides of the mist, is unique.

Titus now experiences himself in a pure state of self-discovery and the childish vengefulness disappears as his awareness of solitude modulates into a fascinated awareness of the mystery and, paradoxically, the fragility of his home. The personification in the following

description is an indicator of the projection of Titus's state of mind onto the Castle. He is no longer concerned with controlling its inhabitants, with going to school or with his name. His vision expands with the silent mists and in that stillness he, without words, experiences both his isolation and his involvement in the world around him:

Away to the west the roofscape of his heavy home floated, as lightly as though every stone were a petal. Strung across the capstone jaws of its great head a hundred windows, the size of teeth, reflected the dawn. . . . The mountain's head shone above him. Was there no living thing on those stark slopes but the truant child? It seemed that the heart of the world had ceased to beat. The ivy leaves fluttered a little and a flag here and there stirred against its pole, but there was no vitality in these movements, no purpose, any more than the long hair of some corpse, tossing this way and that in a wind, can deny the death of the body it flatters. (p.101)

From the glimpse into Titus's mind in the previous passage, we are presented, here, with the omniscient view of the narrator, and a picture of the Castle as both flower and skull -- a perfect ambiguity. We draw back from the picture in order to appreciate its vastness as well as the minute vulnerability of the child, who nonetheless is as integral a part of the scene as Eustacia Vye is necessary to the completion of Rainbarrow.²⁹ From another point of view, we only see the landscape with its twin focal points, the Castle and the Mountain, because Titus sees it and, furthermore, we see it in terms of the complex of emotions he experiences -- rebellion, awe, excitement, still fascination. The timeless moment passes however, as the last sentence of the chapter builds up to a triumphant crescendo: "The wind was gone and the mists were gone and the clouds were gone and the day was warm and young, and Titus was on the slopes of Gormenghast Mountain" (p.102).

There are interesting parallels between this passage and Steerpike's climb over the rooftops in Titus Groan, parallels more striking than those between Steerpike's discovery of the roof world and Titus's of the coloured balcony, for Titus now achieves a similar comprehensiveness of vision with all Gormenghast stretched before him. There is an important difference, however, for where Steerpike remains in physical contact with the Castle, Titus flees its walls

and takes visual possession of it from afar. Both overcome fear and danger, but where Steerpike achieves a sense of the insistent materiality of the enormous Castle and works to dismember it by taking hold of specific elements -- the tower of herons, the purple figures on the tree, the window of Fuchsia's attic -- Titus, on the contrary, achieves a sense of the immateriality of the Castle as it floats on the mists. At this point, he cannot isolate parts: he is obliged to see the Castle as monolithic, an integrated immensity. It will be seen that this vision of the Castle (similar to Fuchsia's vision of its outline behind the intrusive figure of Steerpike) blots out the elements of decay and oppression, retains the sombre splendour and becomes increasingly important for Titus once he moves beyond "the land of his ancestors."

At the moment, however, he is engrossed with the exciting strangeness of these lands. "The landscape was alive," writes Peake (p.103) and, like Hardy, proceeds to describe "inanimate Nature as pensive mutes."³⁰ The natural world is humanized in a way that recalls Peake's poem, "With People, So With Trees":

With people, so with trees: where there are groups
Of either, men or trees, some will remain
Aloof while others cluster where one stoops
To breathe some dusky secret. Some complain

And some gesticulate and some are blind;
Some toss their heads above green towns; some freeze
For lack of love in corpses of mankind;
Some laugh; some mourn; with people, so with trees.³¹

Nature is instinct with human significance, a parable of human experience. But there is another way of viewing nature: "They were only trees, after all: branches, roots and leaves" (p.103). Titus can choose to see patterns of human community in the trees or he can see them simply as trees, as other than him. The potential disjunction can be seen in the rest of the paragraph: "The landscape was alive, but so was Titus. . . . This was his day; there was no time to waste" (p.103). The egocentrism of this, with its dismissive attitude toward the trees, is qualified by the ensuing description of the colour and variety of the surroundings. There is, ultimately, great value in being "only" a tree, a dragonfly, a bird, a lizard, a snake, a boy, "only" Titus, not Titus Groan, 77th Earl of Gormenghast.

Thus, the tension in Titus between isolating rejection and integrating involvement is seen in his response to nature, just as it is seen increasingly in his response to Gormenghast, at once hating its weighty oppression and delighting in its secret places.

At all times, one of the prime motivating factors for Titus is his curiosity, a curiosity which in turn intensifies the tension between the instinct to participate, even to merge completely with the environment, and the fear that the loss of self, the threat to the identity will become overwhelming, leading to a violent reassertion of the separate ego. The paradigm for this tension is clearly the sexual act, and it comes as no surprise that chapter nineteen presents Titus's penetration into the forest by means of sexual imagery. The sense that a mystery is to be fathomed is conveyed in chapter sixteen:

His yearnings became focused. His truancy no longer nagged him. His curiosity burned.

What brooded within those high and leafy walls? Those green and sunny walls? What of the inner shadows? What of the acorn'd terraces, and the hollow aisles of leaves?

(p.103)

These questions already suggest the dual nature of Titus's discoveries: there will be both the summery delight of "forests ancient as the hills, / Enfolding sunny spots of greenery" and the threat of something alien, beyond human control, some terrifying primaeval experience that reaches beyond the codified religion that is Gormenghast's. Titus will have to walk the "hollow aisles of leaves" that recall

that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!

32

That some "timeworn drama" is going to be enacted is emphasised by the opening paragraph of chapter nineteen: 33

The margin of the forest under whose high branches Titus was standing was an interwoven screen of foliage, more like a green wall constructed for some histrionic purpose than a natural growth. Was it to hide away some

drama that it arose there, so sheer and so thick?
 Or was it the backcloth of some immortal mime? Which
 was the stage and which the audience? There was not a sound.
 (p.130)

The answer to the questions is that the forest both hides the drama of seasonal transition and provides the backdrop for Titus's miming of the process of transition. It is both stage and audience. Titus experiences initiation into the mythic world of nature, a necessary precursor to any initiation into a linear world defined by historical sequence. In his little form he thus contains "the history of man" and demonstrates the movement of man through the mythopoeic phase. In this passage, he fulfils the promise of the description that precedes his Christening in Titus Groan: "There was the history of man in his face. A fragment from the enormous rock of mankind. A leaf from the forest of man's passion and man's knowledge and man's pain. That was the ancientness of Titus" (TG, p.115). ³⁴

Titus re-enacts, then, the archetypal drama of death and rebirth. He effects his own dying (the sexual metaphor is implicit here) and rebirth out of the womb of nature as he emerges into the "savage place. . . holy and enchanted":

Titus, wrenching two boughs apart, thrust himself forward and wriggled into the green darkness; thrust again, prising his feet against a great lateral root. The leaves and the moss were cold with the dew. Working forwards on his elbows, he found his way almost completely barred by a tough network of boughs; but the edge of his eagerness to break his way through was whetted, for a branch had swung back and switched him across his cheek, and in the pain of the moment he fought the muscled branches, until the upper part of his body had forced a gap which he kept from re-closing with his aching shoulders. His arms were forward of his body and he was able to free his face of the leaves, and, as he panted to regain his breath, to see ahead of him, spreading into the clear distances, the forest floor like a sea of golden moss. From its heaving expanses, arose, as through the chimera of a daydream, a phantasmic gathering of ancient oaks. Like dappled gods they stood, each in his own preserve, the wide glades of moss flowing between them in swathes of gold and green and away into the clear, dwindling distances.

When his breath came more easily, Titus realized the silence of the picture that hung there before him. Like a canvas of gold with its hundreds of majestic oaks, their

winding branches dividing and sub-dividing into gilded fingertips -- the solid acorns and the deep clusters of the legendary leaves.

His heart beat loudly as the warm breath of the silence flowed about him and drew him in.

In his last wrench and thrust to escape from the marginal boughs, his coat was torn off bodily by a thorn-tree with a hand of hideous fingers. He left it there, hanging from the branch, the long thorns of the tree impaling it like the finger-nails of a ghou! (pp.130-131)

If I have quoted at length from this chapter, it is because it seems crucial to an appreciation of the kind of initiation which Titus undergoes here. The passage reveals a fine sense of balance between the immediate physical actuality of Titus's experience (this is, after all, also a boy's adventure, with all its attendant scratches and bruises) and the timeless wonder of it. Interestingly, Peake once more uses the image of acorns that become oaks that become "dappled gods" to convey the importance of appreciating both the simplicity of things and their relationship to a greater mythic whole. This becomes an image for the deepening and broadening of Titus's spiritual and imaginative vision.

Titus's psychological growth, and the ambivalent nature of that growth are expressed in the symbols of the passage. He sheds the outward personality, represented by the coat, but it hangs on the "hideous fingers" of a ghoulish tree.³⁵ The death of the conscious self is not an easy one, but the idyllic vision that ensues cannot be experienced without that death. It is a vision of "the sun that is young once only" at "the birth of the simple light."³⁶ It is the green and gold of a world that is innocent of time, without language, where the only sound is the heartbeat of the newly reborn child.

Also central to the passage is the image of the glade as "a sea of golden moss" whose "heaving expanses" flow between the trees. Peake's ambiguous use of the sea image is seen throughout Titus Groan and Gormenghast. When connected with Swelter, "the sidling sea-cow" (TG,p.430), it is something vast and dangerous in which all innocence is drowned. Similarly, to look into the eyes of Barquentine, that symbol of all that is oppressive and dehumanizing in Gormenghast, is to undergo "ordeal by water; all innocence was drowned" (TG,p.450). At the end of Gormenghast, however, the expanse of water works in collusion with the Castle to destroy the satanic force of Steerpike

in a re-enactment of the flood that symbolically, if not actually, restored the world to innocence. At this half-way point of Titus's experience, the "heaving expanses" of the moss represent a dream world where the delighted and innocent merging of the self with the timeless natural world is made possible.³⁷

Titus flies through the green and golden air, but the "exhilaration"(p.131) does not last and the terror of the loss of self becomes more and more overpowering, "[f]or it was as though he were being drawn towards some dangerous place or person. . . ." (p.132). The "dark margin" is now pure threat as Titus veers away in order to cross the "sickening and phantom land" as quickly as possible in the hope of emerging whole at the other end (p.132). It is now that the danger of the place is revealed in the "living creature" which Titus sees flying through mid-air: "This creature was exquisitely slender. It floated through the golden air like a feather, the slender arms along the sides of the gracile body, the head turned slightly away and inclined a little as though on a pillow of air" (p.132).

This "living creature" is, of course, the Thing, the bastard child of Keda, the foster-sister of Titus, who cried to him across Gormenghast Lake at his Earling, suggesting then that she would have something to do with the rebellious force for life that struggles against all that is muffling and deadening in the dust of the Stones. The incestuous overtones of Titus's relationship with the Thing are a part of the tradition of Sentimental and Gothic fiction. Elizabeth MacAndrew quotes Paul et Virginie and Atala as examples of this and also comments on the darker horrors of The Monk and Vathek. She writes that "the mutual reflection of Sentimental characters is also a true image. The reflection of evil characters on the other hand is seen in a distorting mirror, as in the evil doubles figures, because evil is seen as a distortion, a monstrousness abhorrent to the virtuous mind."³⁸ She adds that "[w]hen the mutually reflecting Sentimental characters appear in a remote and idyllic setting, they are true children of Nature. It is here that they appear in a quasi-incestuous relationship."³⁹ The Thing is clearly the positive reflection of Titus's imaginative and creative impulses, while Steerpike is the distorted shadow, whose own shadow appears full of evil (see Gormenghast, chapter thirty-eight).

When we first see the Thing in Gormenghast, she appears to have something in common with Steerpike. We find her in an area of the Castle that no one alive has ever seen. Thus, she is established as agile and distinct from the inhabitants of the Castle. This is where the similarity between the two ends, however, for Steerpike's rebel nature is seen in the limited terms of political power (abetted by a perverse lust for psychic domination), while the Thing is clearly an anima figure who "wants life." Jung explains: "Everything the anima touches becomes numinous -- unconditional, dangerous, taboo, magical. . . . Because the anima wants life, she wants both good and bad," (she wants both "the A of distilled glory" and "the Z of vileness").⁴⁰ Jung goes on to add that "[a]lthough she may be the chaotic urge to life, something strangely meaningful clings to her, a secret knowledge or hidden wisdom, which contrasts most curiously with her irrational elfin nature."⁴¹ Titus moves beyond "the dark margin," beyond the shadows of the forest, into a new and awesome life power. He confronts both the terror and the dynamic energy contained in the exposure to the forces of being, that, in everyday experience, are carefully hidden or controlled by "the symbolism of creed and ritual."⁴²

There is an intriguing correlation between the imagery used to describe Titus's experience in the forest and that used to describe the hidden ivy-covered pavement where the herons roost and where we first see the Thing. The air "had something of an underwater feeling about it," and the herons "seemed stage-lit in the beams of the westering sun." A "greenish light" pervades the hall, while "the claw-shaped head of Gormenghast Mountain shines like a jade carving" (the masculine image of the Mountain is linked here with the jade-headed cane of Sepulchgrave, an ironic comment on his failure as a father), and the dome of the roof of the heronry was "once golden and green with a painting" (pp.70-72). All this conveys the sense of a drama of the instinctive natural world being played out in Titus's "citylike home." In this case, art, uninigorated by life, finds itself unable to retain its virginal vitality, distanced as it is by "the distant hazes of the indeterminate terrain" (p.71). Thus the painting fades. The passage prefigures Titus's response to the Mountain where he will, as "untarnished child-shaped mirror" (TG,p.112) achieve the reinvigoration of the Castle he reflects.

The image of the Thing in this passage is also a prefiguration of the forest scene, her identity as anima figure made clear as she appears for a moment on the terrace, "leaving only the impression of something overcharged with life -- or something slight as a hazel switch" (p.73). The link between her and Titus is suggested by the zephyr that attends her appearance. As something immaterial, it stresses the symbolic nature of the relationship between them: ". . . a zephyr had broken through the wall of moribund air and run like a gay and tameless thing over the gaunt, harsh spine of Gormenghast's body. It. . . sang its way past seven storeys and was, all at once, in a hall of dove-grey light and was clasping Titus in a noose of air" (p.73). This symbolic level is modified as Titus moves into adolescence, but at this point the Thing is the nixie, siren, or wood-nymph of Jung's description.⁴³ She is the ultimately desirable. Thus, Titus's "fear was in some way lessened by a peculiar thrill which seemed to grow in intensity rather than quieten until it had become a trembling globe of ice under his ribs. Something for which he had unconsciously pined had shown either itself or its emblem in the gold oak woods" (p.133). The globe of the marble becomes the globe of ice, the globe of a new world that must be faced and conquered. The Thing represents for Titus not only a knowledge of his own potential for life within the secret glades of his ancestral lands, but a call to a life beyond those lands. She is "that essence so far removed from what was Gormenghast. . . . The glimpse of a world, of an unformulated world, where human life could be lived by other rules than those of Gormenghast. . ." (pp.133-134). At the moment of this perception, however, Titus's poetic hunger for that which lies beyond the horizon becomes a very prosaic hunger for food. We are returned to the world of the boy's adventure, as we are returned to consciousness, albeit a consciousness that has been powerfully enriched by its glimpse into a beautiful and frightening nether world, "once below a time"⁴⁴:

. . . the oaks no longer cast their ancestral spell across the vistas, but were challenged by a variety of trees and shrubs, until the last of those gnarled monarchs had withdrawn and Titus found himself in a fresher atmosphere, then, at last he was clear of the nightmare and, with his hunger for redundant proof, was once again in the clear, sharp, actual world that he knew. (p.135)

Titus's journey into the forest has, thus, several levels of significance. At the most basic level, it is the adventure of the rebellious child who is tired of being told what to do and seeks the freedom to be his own master (with a vengeful desire to be everyone else's master too). It becomes a much more important journey, however, having psychological, imaginative and mythic value. Titus takes his first steps towards individuation by confronting the terror and beauty of the unconscious -- the "dark margin" of the trees, the heaving sea of moss and the fleeting wisp provide the images for this experience. Furthermore, the expanding of the imagination which began with the coloured balcony and the marble, is given impetus by this confrontation with a world that is "Wholly Other" (see above, p.130). By merging with the otherness of nature, Titus, finally, experiences a genuine return to the mythic beginnings of the world, rather than the dull, mechanical repetition of ritual which deadens the life of the Castle. Here he is in the presence of the living gods, the oaks and the wood-nymph, and he becomes "more an antelope than a boy" (p.132). Forms are no longer fixed but changing. Joyous metamorphosis is the positive image of a oneness with the natural world. The dividing ego, separating self from other, is forced into submission.

But, of course, this is not the beginning of the world. It is a return, a re-enactment of the drama and involves a re-emergence into the world that has become old. Titus is indeed like an antelope, rather than like the "tiger-men" or the "clamorous centaurs":

When through the blood-dark dawn a man with antlers
Cried, and throughout the day the echoes suffered
His agony and died in the evening air -- 45

Titus's return to consciousness is both necessary and tragic and is an image of the tragic necessity of man's departure from Eden, from myth into history. Nevertheless, Titus has seen the "damsel with a dulcimer," he has drunk "the milk of Paradise" and the "globe of ice," like the caves of the poem, is a promise that there is a "terrible beauty" hidden only from those without sufficient courage to answer the challenge of the Mountain. ⁴⁶

Peake's sense of the oppositions that structure experience is

seen in the timely appearance of Flay who both counters and complements the effect of the Thing. Flay, so "woven into the skein of the castle's central life" (p.9) that banishment means death, opposes the tameless detachment of the Thing. On the other hand, his ability to adapt to and flourish in the world of nature suggests the regenerative potential that attracts Titus. Flay has become a sort of wild man of the woods whose clothes have become so bleached that the "olive-and-grey rags" are "indistinguishable among the leaves of the forest" (p.136). We also find out that "[h]e had learned during his exile among the woods and rocks the value of silence, and it was second nature for him to pick his way over the ground like a man born to the woods" (p.138). But Flay does not identify with his surroundings in the unconscious way the Thing seems to. He has consciously learned this new world and brings the human desire for control and utilitarian order to bear on it. He builds a ford and a dam. Furthermore, his sure knowledge of the terrain and his silence (later, even his clicking knee joints are cured by the sunshine) are ultimately seen to serve the interests of the Castle, as he uses his "uncanny" sense of orientation to map out the Lifeless Halls and to stalk Steerpike (p.336). (There is a suggestive parallel between their surefooted explorations through paths unknown to others, except that Flay's surety comes from the tutoring of the natural world and leads to the triumphing of the Castle over the threat of Steerpike).

Titus sees in Flay the "legendary" servant of his father (p.140), and responds to him as someone who lives an exciting life outside the Castle walls, but, just as the Thing represents the call to strange worlds, so Flay represents the call to the old familiar outline that is home: "You must not fail the Stones," he tells Titus (p.143), and his definition of exile will strike a responsive chord in the young Earl's heart when he finds himself beyond the furthest reaches of Gormenghast: "To have your heart dug out; to have it dug out with its long roots, lordship -- that's what exiled means" (p.142).

With this impression of Flay fresh in his mind, Titus returns to the Castle, with a feeling of pride in his position as Earl: "At that moment he was glad he was heir to the mountainous bulks of masonry that rose above him, of the towers, and of the tracts he had crossed that morning in the low rays of the sun" (p.145). But it is as a small, ragged, tearful child that he rushes into Fuchsia's arms, and

his time in the Lichen Fort provides a counterpoint to his discovery of the green world. It is shown here that human love and community are just as important as solitude, that the need to discover other people is just as important as the need to discover oneself. So Fuchsia and Titus rejoice in "the cocoon of a compassion and an integration one with another as deep, it seemed, as the line of their ancestors; as inchoate, imponderable, and uncharted as the realms that were their darkened legacy" (p.145). It is, ironically, that very legacy that makes the present shared moment possible, just as it is the "land of his ancestors" that gives Titus his earlier experience.

There is a touching and tender quality about the Lichen Fort scenes, owing not a little to the irony that at the moment of greatest imprisonment, the young boy experiences the most honest communication with other human beings. Most notable here is Bellgrove, with his wonderful hair, his weak eyes and his agonizing teeth, his ambition and his laziness, his simple-minded egotism and his sound heart. When he follows his instincts he becomes likeable, sympathetic, a friend to Titus, bridging the gap between the formal school system and the spontaneity of boyhood. When he postures, he is either ludicrous (as with the Professors) or thoroughly obnoxious (as with Irma). This conflict of roles is deftly and humorously captured when he comes to visit Titus:

His noble, leonine head was weak with sympathy for the child, but he was doing his best to play the rôle of headmaster. He had to inspire confidence. That was one of the things that headmasters had to do. He must be Dignified and Strong. He must evoke Respect. What else had he to be? He couldn't remember. (p.149)

The inhibiting nature of rules of conduct, so prevalent in the whole ritual structure of the Castle, is seen in microcosm in Bellgrove. What we also see, however, is another example of the complex grotesque character who reveals the capacity for growth, even for increasing self-knowledge. The childishness that has been most noticeable up to now becomes a much more positive childlikeness. Pouring red ink down Opus Fluke's throat and delighting in the position of headmaster simply for the pleasure of sitting in a special chair and giving

orders (pp.117-118) is like Clarice pouring black ink on Gertrude (TG,p.247) or Titus wanting all the people in the Castle to be his puppets. It is the self-centred game of "I'm the king of the castle / You're the dirty rascal." The game that is played in the Fort is very different, however. In the true spirit of "homo ludens," headmaster and boy find "a reality, a world apart, a secret place" (p.150) where pride that divides gives way to a "vulnerable heart" that is "swollen with love" (p.153). In this alternative world they settle down to a game of marbles, in defiance of the conventional barriers of age, status or any "ghastly ritual, that denies the spirit" (p.150). We have already seen how evocative the marble is for Titus, a doorway to the world of the imagination and here, used for its original purpose in a game, the importance of the transforming imagination is again stressed. Huizinga writes that "all play is a voluntary activity. . . . By this quality of freedom alone, play marks itself off from the course of the natural process. It is something added thereto and spread out over it like a flowering, an ornament, a garment." ⁴⁷

The entry of Doctor Prunesquallor with his verbosity and wild laugh simply underlines the way in which the game, the spirit of play transcends incongruities, bringing them together in a happy and unexpected harmony, liberating the forces for love and growth:

For the next hour, the old prison warder, peering through a keyhole the size of a table-spoon, in the inner door, was astounded to see the three figures crawling to and fro across the floor of the prison fort, to hear the high trill of the Doctor develop and strengthen into the cry of a hyena, the deep and wavering voice of the Professor bell forth like an old and happy hound, as his inhibitions waned, and the shrill cries of the child reverberate about the room, splintering like glass on the stone walls while the marbles crashed against one another, spun in their tracks, lodged shuddering in their squares, or skimmed the prison floor like shooting stars. (p.158)

The shift in perspective here, from being inside the room, to peering through the keyhole with the warder, is a fine touch, emphasising the sense of a precious "world apart," in which only the initiated may share. In this case the initiated are those who can become as little children with all the potential for redemption that that implies.

The scene also recalls Steerpike staring through the keyhole at Fuchsia, her father and the Doctor. The parallel implied between "the pale man," whose wink revolts Titus (p.147), and the warder is not fortuitous. Steerpike becomes not only warder of Titus, but threatens his world, both public and private, in a much more serious way, as he plans the Earl's "accidental" death and, with his death, the effective death of the Castle as it exists now with all its woe and all its wonder (p.349).

This scene between Titus and the two elderly men also impresses us with the fact that Gormenghast, dealing as it does with Titus's education, provides him with a number of father figures to substitute for the ineffectuality of Sepulchrave. Flay presents duty to the Castle as something worthwhile and life-sustaining; Bellgrove shows that formal education can be combined with sympathy and an ability to enter into the child's world; Prunesquallor shows that loyalty to the Castle need not be mindless and humourless. Barquentine should also be a father surrogate, nurturing in Titus a love for the Stones. He, on the contrary, has no care at all for the human dimension of the Castle's life. To look at a member of the family, for him, is to look at a link in the chain and to look at the Mountain is not to look at life but to decide which form of the ritual to adopt for the day (pp.159-160). For Barquentine, "[i]t was the Idea that obsessed him and not the embodiment. He moved in a hot sea of vindication, a lust of loyalty" (p.160).

It is Titus's fear of Barquentine that leads to the terrifying adventure in the Hollow Halls. Preceding the description of the Hollow Halls is that of the strange being who sleeps in a wonderful tree. This juxtaposition of the Thing with the Halls suggests the inverted relationship of Titus's two important journeys. The glade becomes lighter and lighter as the sun sets: "The level beams streamed from the west; the glade shuddered, and then, silent and motionless as a picture of itself, it gave up all its secrets" (p.177). The image of mystery silently revealed looks back to Titus's vision of the golden moss, just as the image of the Thing swinging from branch to branch again suggests its natural affinity for the freedom of the woodland world, with its bees, its birds and its squirrels finding shelter in the dead tree.⁴⁸ How different is the world in which Titus now finds himself: "Like a child lost in the chasmic

mazes of a darkening forest, so was Titus lost in the uncharted wilderness of a region long forgotten" (p.179). Behind the "dark margin" of the forest was hidden something rich and vital, but in the stone labyrinth there is, simply, nothingness, the silence of the void rather than of overwhelming plenitude: ". . . here, unlike the child lost in the forest, Titus was surrounded by a fastness without sentience. There was no growth and no movement. There was no sense here that a sluggish sap was sleeping somewhere; was waiting in the stony tracts for an adamant April. . . . Would nothing stir? Was there no pulse in all these mocking tracts? . . . Empty, silent, forbidding as a lunar landscape, and as uncharted, a tract of Gormenghast lay all about him" (p.179).

This time, there is no beauty in the nightmare, only terror. The face that Gormenghast now turns to Titus is a subterranean labyrinth that brings him into frightening contact with the negation that is death. This is the monstrous face that freezes all life, all imagination, and Titus finds that the make-believe world of adventure stories and "what he had read about explorers" (p.180) cannot transform "these mocking tracts." Titus is forced to live through this adventure entirely alone and the rhetorical questions imply a conscious examination of what it means to be living one's own adventure: "Was this what it was to be an explorer? An adventurer? To gulp this sleeping silence. To be so unutterably alone with it, to wade in it, to find it rising like a tide from the floors. . . ." (p.179). As an adventurer, Titus has to pit his wits against an inhospitable landscape and his resources are reduced until he is but "a poor, bare, forked animal."⁴⁹ His courage and resilience are to be tested to the utmost. At a psychological level, Titus again has to face the terrors of the unconscious, of the unknown world, and here the shadow is not merely a "dark margin" through which he has to pass, but a prolonged confrontation with darkness and death. In terms of his creative imagination, Titus experiences the horror of its failure to transform this world, while at a mythic level, he enters the underside of Paradise, which is Hell, where merging does not mean realizing oneself through another dimension, becoming one with the gods. On the contrary, in the Hollow Halls, merging means entropy, the gradual return to a state of undifferentiated chaos: "It seemed that he had begun to be absorbed into the stone. He must

be on his feet. He must keep moving" (p.181).

At the point of utter desperation it is the urge to life, the basic desire for survival that saves Titus, when a raven appears and drops a silver bracelet from its beak: "It walked with a sedate and self-absorbed air. . . . Very gradually Titus altered the direction of his head so that he could observe it, this living thing" (p.182). Titus follows it because it represents "the open air, and the woods and the wide sky" (p.182). The raven is a very evocative image here. On the one hand, it suggests the Countess's birds and seems to represent maternal security, the call of the mother to her wayward child. On the other hand, it anticipates the carving of the raven coveted and stolen by the Thing, an act which leads Titus into his first physical experience of sex and an intensification of his desire for life. But the raven is traditionally associated with death, and the Thing dies as an indirect result of stealing the raven. It is ironic, then, that the bird should lead Titus out of the Halls into a resurrection, out of the tomb, through the underground tunnel with its "smell of decay" (p.182). The first sight to greet his eyes is "the tower'd outline of his ancient home" (p.183), with its suggestion of the waiting mother and a return to the womb. The Janus-faced Castle is well captured in this passage: it is both home and ghastly nightmare and Titus has now confronted both aspects.⁵⁰

The common elements in Titus's experiences, up to this point, have been an isolation from the central activities of the Castle, and a tension between love and loathing that informs his attitude towards the Castle. In isolation he gallops his horse through the empty halls, establishing himself as hero, rebel and schoolboy. In isolation he discovers a wonderful secret world and takes possession of it. In mental, if not physical, isolation he discovers the glory of colour and the awesome power of the imagination. All these incidents take place inside the Castle, which is thus established as a positive context for the growth of the self both physically and imaginatively. This is qualified by Titus's journey to the Mountain where the Castle becomes a symbol of repression and death as opposed to the call to freedom and life contained in the Mountain's "Do you dare?" This apparently straightforward polarity is again qualified as Titus experiences the trauma of freedom and realizes that it can mean a loss of self more thorough than anything the codified ritual of the

Castle represents, for it can mean a return to the undifferentiated sea of unconsciousness at the beginning of time, that is both transcendent and terrifying. Thus, the return to the Castle is seen in a comforting light -- the light of consciousness, gentle love and community in the prison which, in turn, becomes the sacred space for play. Release from the prison is soon followed by another experience of freedom, this time an inversion of the freedom of the forest. The Lifeless Halls present Titus with the freedom to die, not to merge with an ultimately regenerative nature, but to merge into the decay at the end of time.⁵¹ On both occasions, in the forest and the halls, he experiences the archetypal pattern of transition encompassing death and rebirth. On both occasions the Castle is a haven to return to (even, ironically, when the Castle provides the image of the death experience).

Having survived these crucial moments of initiation, Titus is now drawn more and more strongly into the centre of the Castle's activities, with two events framing this movement: his tenth birthday celebrations and his heroic struggle with Steerpike. The period preceding Titus's tenth birthday is marked by the drawing together of the "good" characters, those who will defend the Castle, and by an acceleration of events leading to the final cataclysm, the most notable of these events being the killing of Barquentine and the eruption of antagonism between Titus and Steerpike. The impression is that, at this point of the novel, the knowledge which Titus has gained about himself and his home has been a preparation for his role as Keeper of the Seals and Defender of the Faith. What has been a fairly episodic structure becomes a more and more tightly orchestrated plot with the emphasis on cause, effect and climax. Titus is to vindicate himself as the daring and courageous hero in an epic romance.

The Castle is seen in an increasingly favourable light as the "good" characters come together. They all have one thing in common -- the spirit of the child. In Prunesquallor we see the delight in the Nonsense world as a release from an oppressive reality. The alacrity with which he joins in the game of marbles and his willingness to play the fool to relax Fuchsia (pp.189-190) make him a figure of love and trust. Flay's surreptitious acts of pilfering in order to provide Fuchsia with delectables (TG,p.77), his wide, clear eyes,

and his instinctive loyalty to the spirit of the Castle also make of him a character to whom the children may respond positively. Although his interest in the tunnel is due to pragmatic considerations, it nevertheless forges a stronger bond between him and the children: "The news of the underground passage seemed to have had a great effect on him, although they could not think why -- for although to them it had been a very real and forbidding adventure, yet from bitter experience they knew that what was wonderful to them was usually of little interest to the adult world" (p.292). Fuchsia, "ridiculously immature for all her twenty years" (p.145), shares in Titus's adventures, if only vicariously, precisely because of that immaturity. The conflict between child and developing adult that is seen in her echoes the same conflict in her brother, and is even conceived in similar terms of exploration:

The emotions and the tags of half-knowledge which came to her, fought and jostled, upsetting one another, so that what was natural to her appeared un-natural, and she lived from minute to minute, grappling with each like a lost explorer in a dream who is now in the arctic, now on the equator, now upon rapids, and now alone on endless tracts of sand. (p.190)

Like Titus, Fuchsia needs to integrate her experience, as child and as adult, as Fuchsia and as Lady Fuchsia. But it is her childlikeness that draws her so close to Titus and makes her one of the motivating factors behind his determination to rid the Castle of Steerpike. He avenges her simplicity and her innocence. Gertrude is the fifth character central to the defense of Gormenghast and, like her children, there is an element of the eternal child in her. It is clear that she finds difficulty in seeing herself as a mother, in the sense of an adult woman who has given birth to children. When Titus calls her "mother," we read that "[a] shadow settled for a moment on her broad brow. The word mother had perplexed her" (p.315). One remembers, too, the expression on her face when she calls her cats: "Lady Groan was leaning forward in bed, her eyes were like a child's; wide, sweet and excited" (TG,p.61). It is just this childlike quality that makes both her and her daughter unfathomable for someone like Steerpike, whose mind works like a machine, intricate and well-oiled. To him, Fuchsia is a "simpleton" (TG,p.159), and there is no point of

contact between his mind and Gertrude's. ⁵²

The drawing together of all the characters who have some affinity for the childlike suggests that in defending the Castle these characters are defending the age of childhood, of innocence, "the hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower." ⁵³ The world of myth, of the beginning of the world is defended by the world of romance; the god is protected by the hero. The emphasis on the preciousness of the Castle, in the latter half of the novel, is seen especially in chapter forty-five, which describes the icy winter that descends on Gormenghast. The snow that buries the countryside and maroons the Castle seems to be an image of the threat that is building up in the form of Steerpike, the threat that the world is coming to an end. The death of the birds, movingly and beautifully described, takes on added significance in that they are so closely associated with Gertrude, herself the human image of the Castle as mother, as womb, as nest:

It seemed that, upon the vast funeral linen of the snowscape, each bird of all these hosts had signed, with an exquisite and tragic artistry, the proof of its own death, had signed it in a language at once undecipherable and eloquent -- a hieroglyphic of fantastic beauty. (p.294)

The hieroglyphic, "at once undecipherable and eloquent," is also the language of the Castle that Titus is learning, and the image of the Castle as "death, matter, mother, childhood consciousness and repression, the moribund self" is thus reversed. ⁵⁴ We see the Castle as haven, sanctuary, preserver of life: "The severity of the weather had made of the castle a focal point. Not only had the bird-life of the immediate region been drawn to Gormenghast, but the forests and moors of far distant places had become empty" (p.294). Even the Hollow Halls, which were a tomb for Titus, become a home for Flay, as he breaks the letter of the law in order to protect its spirit.

Another, and perhaps unexpected way in which the Castle is made worthy of protection is through a reversal of sympathy with regard to that symbol of its repressive elements -- Barquentine. The dwarf's passionate devotion to the letter of the Law has led, not only to an undervaluing of the human agents of the Law, but to an inability to read human character adequately. Hence, his myopia where Steerpike

is concerned, and his indirect involvement in the rise to power of "the cold and cerebral beast" (p.488). Both Barquentine and Steerpike seem to represent an adult world characterized by inflexibility of purpose, pragmatic narrow-mindedness, lack of compassion and a total inability to respond with love and imaginative generosity to the world around them. They represent the threat of age that petrifies the flowering of youth. It is, therefore, ironic that where Fuchsia should respond to Steerpike's youth at Sourdust's funeral, Titus sees in him, ten years later, "the presence of officialdom, age-old and vile, with its scarlet hands, and its hunched shoulders. . ." (p.310). ⁵⁵ Thus, all the negative forces of the Castle are projected onto Steerpike, while, at the same time, the threat posed by him is presented in increasingly diabolical terms until he is explicitly identified with Satan. On the other hand, Barquentine, intrinsically of the Castle in a way that Steerpike is not, becomes increasingly a figure for compassion. These two movements reach a climax during the murder of Barquentine.

Just before the murder, our respect for Steerpike's intellect is diminished, our erstwhile admiration for his brilliance as a strategist qualified by the fact that "[t]here were at least three hours to be burned. It was unusual for Steerpike to have to think in such terms" (p.256). On impulse, he decides to visit the Twins and the uncharacteristic impulsiveness exacts its price, as he opens their door to find an axe suspended above his head and the Twins staring transfixedly at him. He has fearfully miscalculated the Twins just as he proceeds to do with Barquentine.

As Steerpike returns from the Twins' apartment, Peake presents us with a bravura passage that focusses all evil, all darkness on the figure of Steerpike. There is also the suggestion that he is the final embodiment of the Shadow that Titus will have to confront before a synthesis of the self can take place. The "dark margin" and the "hollow halls" were simply prelude. Peake asks:

Why should this be -- why with certain slender proportions and certain tricks of movement should a sense of darkness be evoked? Shadows more terrible and grotesque than Steerpike's gave no such feeling. They moved across their walls bloated or spidery with a comparative innocence. It was as though a shadow had a heart -- a heart where blood was drawn from the margins of a world of less

substance than air. A world of darkness whose very existence depended upon its enemy, the light. (p.261)

The parasitical nature of Steerpike's relationship to the Castle is suggested here, as well as the aura of mystery, of the inexplicable that has always hung around him. Where does he come from? Whence his acrobatic skills, his intelligence, his vocabulary, his playacting ability? These elements of his character are now specifically allied with the forces of evil. The black clouds and floods of rain that accompany Steerpike's passage to Barquentine recall the night of Swelter's death and the disappearance of the Earl into the Tower of Flints, whence the owls fly to their bloody hunting grounds. It was a night pervaded by a sense of evil -- the bloody-mindedness of Swelter, the Faustian pact of the Earl. Once more, the elements seem to be in sympathy with the fears of the Castle: "It was a freak of nature, and no more, that the world had been swathed away from the westering sun as though with bandages, layer upon layer, until the air was stifled. Yet it seemed as though the sense of oppression which the darkness had ushered in had more than a material explanation" (p.262).⁵⁶ The coloured, lamplit windows past which Steerpike hurries (like the coloured rooms threatened by disease and death in Poe's The Masque of the Red Death) are compared to "the sea-snake," while the coloured "harp strings" of the rain "hiss" like reptiles (p.264). So, Steerpike becomes the Serpent that, with its predatory malice, eats its way into the Garden only to find itself aborted by its own evil: "And then the giant shade began to shrivel, and as it descended it moved a little forward of its caster, until finally it was a thick and stunted thing -- a malformation, intangible, terrible, that led the way towards those rooms where its immediate journey could, for a little while, be ended" (p.264).

The "thick and stunted thing," the final form of Steerpike's shadow, finds its counterpart in the stunted, malformed Barquentine, whose terrifying fanaticism is now made humanly explicable for us, by means of a personal history. When Titus is in prison, Barquentine is described as having about him "something of the scraggy bird of prey," as well as "something of the gale-twisted thorn tree" and "something of the gnome in his blistered face" and his eyes are "horribly liquid" (p.159). He sleeps on "a lice-infested mattress"

and his face is the personification of "age" and "archaism," "cracked and pitted like stale bread" (pp.161-165). One is almost tempted to agree with Steerpike that "[i]t was time for the dirty core of ritual to be plucked out of the enormous mouldering body of the castle's life. . . ." (p.164). At the time of his murder, he is still the fanatical "wrinkled and filthy dwarf" (p.265), but we are also made aware of the pain caused by his withered leg (p.266), and the mental suffering of his youth, when he was "someone with his head perpetually raised. . . someone on a level with men's knees. . . a target for jibes and scorn" (p.268). There is also the evocative image of a lost child with a birthmark and the child's mother, with her paper boats, "which, wet with her tears and grimed from her cracked hands, she sailed across the harbour of her lap or left stranded about the floor or on the rope matting of her bed, in throngs like fallen leaves, wet, grimed and delicate, in scattered squadrons, a navy of grief and madness" (p.268). Through these glimpses, we are encouraged to see in Barquentine's faith in Gormenghast a sublimation for the absence of love and the horror of his youth, while Steerpike's faith and worship are reserved solely for himself. He realizes what he has assaulted when Barquentine calls him "Traitor": "It was not merely his life he was fighting for. That single word, freezing the air, had revealed what Steerpike had forgotten: that in his adversary he was pitting himself against Gormenghast. Before him he had a living pulse of the immemorial castle" (pp.272-273). ⁵⁷ The demoniac struggle that follows sees the partial failure of Steerpike, "the arch contriver" (p.274).

It is against this background that Titus's tenth birthday celebrations take place, a festivity involving both the pain and the pleasure that are intrinsic to the Castle. On the one hand, Titus is locked away in a room full of toys for the day and then has to submit to being blindfolded and carried to the venue. But this unpleasantness is abundantly compensated for by the wonderful scene that meets his eyes:

A canvas of great depth; of width that spread from east to the west and of a height that wandered way above the moon. It was painted with fire and moonlight -- upon a dark impalpable surface. The lunar rhythms rose and moved through darkness. A counterpoint of bonfires burned like

anchors -- anchors that held the sliding woods in
check. (p.325)

All the great natural elements -- water, earth, fire, air -- combine with the ritual of the Castle to present Titus with another perspective on his world. The transition from a state of blindness to one of illumination has been a common element in all Titus's experiences. Now, that transition is effected not through Titus's own efforts (except insofar as he submits to the ritual) but through the structuring of a time-worn tradition. Initiation into a conscious awareness of his position as Earl (as opposed to the largely unconscious role he played at his Earling) counterpoints the series of initiations into an enriched awareness of himself as a growing boy. The relationship between the present scene and that of the forest is emphasised by the theatrical quality of both, a quality which relates the masque to the theme of private and public roles, private and public worlds, so central to both Titus Groan and Gormenghast.

The theatre is also, of course, the image par excellence for the tension between illusion and reality and is closely linked with the concern that lies at the heart of fantasy -- "illusion" may in fact be reality. The worlds of the fantastic imagination may illuminate the "obliterated real." Thus, the theatrical setting at Titus's birthday is a canvas, a painting, a picture and the firing of the cannon is the magical sign for the painting to come to life, in a similar way to the magic marble that comes to life under the transforming power of Titus's imagination: "It was the sign, and suddenly the picture, as though at the stroke of a warlock's wand, came suddenly to life. The canvas shuddered. Fragments detached themselves and fragments came together" (p.326).⁵⁸ But is this real? The complexity of the relationship between real and illusory worlds is suggested by the effect of the shimmering lake on the scene which it reflects:

And it was this nocturnal glass in whose depths shone the moon-bathed foliage of the chestnut trees that held the eye the longest. For it was nothingness, a sheet of death; and it was everything. Nothing it held was its own although the least leaf was reflected with microscopic accuracy --

and, as though to light these aqueous forms with a luminary of their own, a phantom moon lay on the water, as big as a plate and as white, save where the shadow of its mountains lay. (pp.326-327)

This is an excellent image of the paradox of fantasy that attempts to give expression to the wholeness of the real and, in so doing, passes beyond what is verbally expressible so that it eventually comments on its own inadequacy, its "nothingness," even though "the least leaf [is] reflected with microscopic accuracy." Later, we are told that "the great lake was in reality but a few inches deep. It was a film" (p.330).

There is a most appropriate passage in George MacDonald's Phantastes which links both mirror and stage to the intricate relationship between art and nature:

'What a strange thing a mirror is! and what a wondrous affinity exists between it and a man's imagination! For this room of mine, as I behold it in the glass, is the same, and yet not the same. It is not the mere representation of the room I live in, but it looks just as if I were reading about it in a story I like. All its commonness has disappeared. The mirror has lifted it out of the region of fact into the realm of art; and the very representing of it to me has clothed with interest that which was otherwise hard and bare; just as one sees with delight upon the stage the representation of a character from which one would escape in life as from something unendurably wearisome. But is it not rather that art rescues nature from the weary and sated regards of our senses, and the degrading injustice of our anxious every-day life, and, appealing to the imagination, which dwells apart, reveals Nature in some degree as she really is, and as she represents herself to the eye of the child, whose every-day life, fearless and unambitious, meets the true import of the wonder-teeming world around him, and rejoices therein without questioning?'⁵⁹

The tenth birthday festivity brings together all that is wonderful "to the eye of the child," all that is childlike about the Castle, all that is magic (in the sense of imaginatively enriching). It brings together all that the preceding events have impressed upon us -- the linking of those who share the gift of the child's spirit, the vision of the Castle as life-preserver, the image of Barquentine as a martyr for a good cause.

The masque itself presents the combination of "the dramatic, the appropriate and the ridiculous" (TG,p.302) that characterizes Gormenghast. It recalls the "preposterous quality" of Nannie Slagg "that was in perfect harmony" with the Christening (TG, p.116). More importantly, it contains what Fuchsia looks for in a picture: "What Fuchsia wanted from a picture was something unexpected. It was as though she enjoyed the artist telling her something quite fresh and new. Something she had never thought of before" (TG,p.83). Peake appears to be speaking for himself as much as for Fuchsia, if the evidence of his own drawing and painting is anything to go by, and the masque serves to comment further on both the imaginative world that is Gormenghast and the imaginative process by means of which that world is created. Like the characters in the novels, the masquers move in a way that seems "stiff and exaggerated, but extraordinarily eloquent" (p.328). They are "tinted under the moon's rays with colours as sharp and barbaric as the plumage of tropical birds" (p.328), and evoke the ambivalent response to the grotesque: ". . . Titus could neither laugh nor cry for neither expression was true to what he felt" (p.329). The Kabuki-like stylization of the drama and the archetypal patterns of action on which it draws direct attention to the similar stylization and patterning of the novels. The general theme of the masque seems to be one of evil and treachery (the wolf) that threatens childlike innocence (the lamb), while ineffectual, if noble leadership looks on (the lion) and the self-involved artist ignores (the horse). A general correlation exists between Steerpike and the wolf, Gormenghast and the lamb, Gertrude, Flay and Prunesquallor and the lion (they do a lot of thinking, muttering and planning, but are spurred to action when it is almost too late), and the Poet and the horse. In the masked drama we have, thus, a world within a world within a world. The masks themselves are another means of highlighting the tension between illusion and reality, and act as a further reflection of Gormenghast, for, according to Huizinga, "[t]he sight of the masked figure, as a purely aesthetic experience, carries us beyond 'ordinary life' into a world where something other than daylight reigns; it carries us back to the world of the savage, the child and the poet, which is the world of play."⁶⁰

The masque closes with the emphasis on its formulaic nature, on

the kind of ritual patterning that can both contain and destroy disruptive threats, and preserve the world against change and decay by drawing on the springs of *primaeva* innocence: ". . . all this was a formula as ancient as the walls of the castle itself. . . . the grandeur of the spectacle, and the godlike rhythms of each sequence were of such a nature that there were few present who were not affected as by some painful memory of childhood" (p.331). It is the recollection of something lost, only to be recaptured in fleeting moments. "Footfalls echo in the memory," wrote Eliot:

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
Even while the dust moves
There rises the hidden laughter
Of children in the foliage
Quick now, here, now, always --
Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after. 61

Gormenghast is notable for its concern with the passing of time. There is the scene in the classroom where Peake captures the school-boy's frustration with the slowness of time: "Nine hundred seconds! Oh, marvellous! marvellous! Seconds are so small. One -- two -- three -- four -- seconds are so huge" (p.83). There is the description of the relative nature of time depending on if you are Titus or Barquentine: "And so, after what seemed an infinity to Titus and a whisk of time's skirt to Barquentine, the morning that was both fleet and tardy, fructified and like a grape of air, in whose lucent body the earth was for that moment suspended -- that phantom ripeness throbbed, that thing called noon" (pp.168-169). The natural metaphor used here points forward to chapter fifty-one, and its description of time passing, seen in terms of the seasonal cycle. It is a skilfully managed piece of writing, suggesting at once the cyclic repetition of the mythic world and the linear movement forward to some climactic point that will menace the very existence of that world. Where Fuchsia, the Countess and the Professors are seen in the context of the eternal return, Flay, Prunesquallor and Titus are seen to be moving towards a meeting point whose focus is Steerpike. Thus, we see Fuchsia searching for a lost book, "[a]nd all the while the progress of the seasons, those great tides, enveloped and stained with their passing colours, chilled or warmed with their varying exhalations, the tracts of

Gormenghast" (p.334). Fuchsia, her books, her dreams, her attic world, are at one with the changelessness of her home. As the Countess stands "at the window of her room with the white cats at her feet" (p.338); she, too, becomes identified with the rhythms of recurrence. The past tense becomes the present as the metonymic function gives way to the metaphoric with its patterning of image, the repetition of phrase emphasising the seasonal and cultural periodicity: ⁶²

And the days move on and the names of the months
change and the four seasons bury one another and it
is spring again and yet again and the small streams
that run over the rough sides of Gormenghast Mountain
are big with rain while the days lengthen and summer
sprawls across the countryside, sprawls in all the
swathes of its green, with its gold and sticky head,
with its slumber and the drone of doves and with its
butterflies and its lizards and its sunflowers. . . .

And the days move on and the names of the months
change and the four seasons bury one another and the
field-mice draw upon their granaries. The air is murky
and the sun is like a raw wound in the grimy flesh of
a beggar, and the rags of the clouds are clotted. The
sky has been stabbed and has been left to die above the
world, filthy, vast and bloody. And then the great
winds come and the sky is blown naked, and a wild bird
screams across the glittering land. (pp.337-338)

In contrast to this vision of the land we have Prunesquallor reading in his study. The subject is Fuchsia's poem:

How white and scarlet is that face,
Who knows, in some unusual place
The coloured heroes are alight
With faces made of red and white. (p.335)

The poem, with its unfolding tautologies, suggests Fuchsia's mesmerised state. Her dream world has blinded her to reality instead of providing her with an enriched perception of that reality, and she has been led to idealize the skewbald trickster, as she tries to fit him into her romantic fantasies as the hero-clown. ⁶³ The Doctor, however, reads the poem in order to use it in the outside world, to penetrate Steerpike's mask. In the same way, Flay's subterranean city is not a retreat like Fuchsia's attic. He maps

out the forsaken halls in order to apply his knowledge to action in the world outside those halls. The third figure countering the eternal return is Titus, "wading through his boyhood" (p.338). It is a difficult time for him, as the conflict between Gormenghast as home and as burden intensifies. Gormenghast provides him with his identity, "for its very dust was in his bloodstream, and he knew no other place," but it is also his merciless oppressor, laying on him "the heavy onus of an ancient trust" (p.341). Thus, Flay, Prunesquallor and Titus are linked as active forces in the calm before the storm, as an "unearthly lull" (p.343) settles on the Castle: "It was as though the labyrinthian place had woken from its sleep of stone and iron and in drawing breath had left a vacuum, and it was in this vacuum that its puppets moved" (p.341). The time comes, however, for the denizens of the Castle to stop being puppets and to act, originally, according to a new plot, to protect Gormenghast as she sleeps. This is Steerpike's triumph as he watches the Castle massing its forces: "He had. . . an overweening pride that saw in this concentration of the castle's forces a tribute to himself. This was no part of the ritual of Gormenghast. This was something original" (p.471).

The first act in the drama is the stalking of Steerpike on a night as full of foreboding as those on which Flay killed Swelter and Steerpike killed Barquentine. It seems as if the dawn is but a legend handed down. This poignant image emphasises once more the passage from blindness to sight and the idea that the forthcoming battle is an attempt to restore the freshness of Eden's morning to the decaying Castle: the dawn is "a tale of another world. . . where stones and bricks and ivy stems and iron could be seen as well as touched and smelt, could be lit and coloured, and where at certain times a radiance shone like honey from the east and the blackness was scaled away, and this thing they called dawn arose above the woods as though the fable had materialized, the legend come to life" (p.359).

Appropriately, as if blessing Flay's enterprise, it is the dawn which reveals Steerpike to him, and together with Titus and the Doctor, he responds to the call of the leaves and stones that are "whispering of treachery" (p.367). The underground labyrinth into which the hunters and the hunted penetrate may be seen, in Leslie

Fiedler's words, as "the id, whose buried darkness abounds in dark visions." ⁶⁴ Certainly, it becomes apparent that we are following Steerpike into a world of primitive violence and lust and, insofar as he is Titus's shadow, the young Earl takes the same journey into his own unconscious. The premonition of an uncontrollable and demoniac energy that threatens the destruction of Steerpike in Titus Groan now becomes an actuality, as he enters the tomb of the Twins. The split between the ego and the id is explicitly described: "He was watching himself, but only that he should miss nothing. He was the vehicle through which the gods were working. The dim primordial gods of power and blood" (p.381). He begins to strut around the corpses like "some archetypal warrior, or fiend" (p.381) and Titus feels as if he is sinking into a bottomless pit: "An area of solid ground had given way beneath his feet and he had fallen into an underworld of which he had had no conception. A place where a man can pace like a cock about the ribs and skulls of his victims" (p.382). Steerpike's frail control over himself is rapidly disintegrating, for the fire "had burned part of him away. Something of him was drowned for ever in the waters of the moat" (p.383). The horror of this disintegration is tempered by the sense of its poetic justice. Steerpike, who had once revealed himself as a cold imitator of the artist, a manipulator of the clown, a mocker of the mad, now finds himself the victim of their vengeance. The skewbald red-and-white face is not a clown's mask but his own flesh, frozen in a grimace of evil. Where once he could not submerge himself in the role of the artist, he now finds the artist's frenzy exacting a horrible tribute:

He was in the posture of some earthish dancer, but he soon tired of this strange display -- this throw-back to some savage rite of the world's infancy. He had given himself up to it for those few moments, in a way that the artist can be the ignorant agent of something far greater and deeper than his conscious mind could ever understand.
(p.382)

Finally, the one who had mocked the owl-madness of the Earl now finds himself in the same world, as mind and brain separate: "He lived now among the abstractions. His brain dealt with where he would hide and what he would do if certain contingencies arose, but his mind

floated above all this in a red ether" (p.444). So, wading through "the hot red tides of sin" Steerpike becomes "monarch of darkness like Satan himself" (p.386).

"In crazy balance," Titus is confronted by the heart of darkness, and soon after by "magic insupportable" (p.402), as his relationship with the Thing reaches a climax to counterpoint the experience of Steerpike's satanic vitality. Before this climax, Peake intersperses images of the Thing that reveal the imp of nature, full of nature's contradictions. She taunts the Countess's bird cries in the same way that nature taunts every human being with a sense of its otherness (pp.317-318). She partakes of the cruelty of nature as she throttles her missel-thrush in a world where the fittest survive (p.278). When she steals the carving as it is about to be burnt we sense, with Titus a defiance of "gross wastage" (p.401) and a stunning vitality, sweeping him "into a land of hectic and cruel brilliance" (p.402). As Titus rushes after the Thing, he is specifically compared with Steerpike, for both the "devil" and the "brightest symbol" have "stabbed" the Castle "to the heart" (p.406). The blasphemy of Steerpike becomes the blasphemy of Titus: "He had slapped a god across its age-old face" (p.407). Like Steerpike, he glories in his rebellion, but where Steerpike's inspiration comes from his own dark lusts, that of Titus comes from "a rebel like a lyric in green flight" (p.407), a "lance of light." Where Steerpike identifies with his shadow, Titus identifies with the anima. Titus's love for the Thing partakes of several elements: romance, freedom, difference (pp. 410-411), as well as a physicality stressed by the animal imagery used to describe the landscape: clouds are like hippopotami, the storm is like a wild beast's claws, the Mountain is like a beast imprisoned behind the vertical bars of the rain. This imagery is also a counter-force to the death images that appear "across the lines of the rain," Flay, Steerpike, the Twins (pp.408-411).

It is, ironically, Flay's cave to which Titus turns, as a centre in the wilderness, Flay, whose loyalty to Gormenghast, that other centre, was so unquestionable. The womb-like nature of cave and Castle, of the forest and the tunnel leading out of the Hollow Halls relates Titus's experiences in all these places to the pattern of death and rebirth and suggests that now, with the Thing, the natural, sexual and imaginative promise of the ascent of the Mountain is to

be realized in another phase of the rite de passage. The interplay between the natural and the imaginative is appropriately highlighted by the transformation of the wooden carvings of the Castle into live birds and beasts which are then turned into "radiant carvings among the radiant ferns" by the lightning (p.415) -- and Titus sees the Thing. That he embraces the Thing both literally and symbolically is clear from the dual vision we have of her as crude little savage and as etherial sprite flitting around the cave, and from the description of her as Titus holds her:

He could not see her face; it was closely shrouded in the wet linen, but the shape of it was there as her head tossed to and fro; it was like the head of a sea-blurred marble long drowned beneath innumerable tides, save where a ridge of cloth was stretched across the forehead and took the shape of the temples. Titus, his body and his imagination fused in a throbbing lust, gripping her even more savagely than before with his right arm, tore at the shirt with his left until her face was free. (p.423)

The important cluster of images in this passage -- the sea, the marble, the superfluous clothes that must be discarded -- suggest the crucial climax to Titus's experience in the forest. The fusion of physical and imaginative excitement ensures that the climax will not be of an ordinary nature, but "a kind of glory" (p.423), for Titus has penetrated to "the dark core of life" (p.424) as opposed to the dark core of Steerpike's death-dealing power. True to the pattern of initiations which Titus has experienced, dying to be reborn each time, he now feels "the death of his imagination" (p.424): ⁶⁵

He had learned that there were other ways of life from the ways of his great home. He had completed an experience. He had emptied the bright goblet of romance; at a single gulp he had emptied it. The glass of it lay scattered on the floor. But with the beauty and the ugliness, the ice and the fire of it on his tongue and in his blood he could begin again. (p.424).

The conflict between boy and earl, Titus and Lord Titus can only be resolved, however, once Titus has made his peace with both aspects of his identity. He has promised the independent individual that he will "begin again" and in Titus Alone we find that this means

putting the romance world to the test in a society profoundly unsympathetic to its spirit. Now, Titus has to play out his role as the hero of this romance. There is, thus, a double consummation for Titus in this novel, as boy and as earl.

The final chapters of Gormenghast show Peake at his best, orchestrating the "black and endless deluge" (p.428) that washes the Castle clean. The Castle is presented in a consistently positive light, as the images of haven, sanctuary, and life-preserver are more and more strongly endorsed. Not even the Carvers can attack the Castle any longer, as it sustains them, while the link between Gertrude, the mother, Gormenghast, the womb, and the flood, the unconscious becomes more impressive, as all the world is drawn into the nest which it must then protect against the serpent.

The capture and killing of Steerpike is finally Titus's task, and Colin Manlove has gone to some trouble to discuss the confusion and inadequacy of the young earl's motives.⁶⁶ We may certainly concede, with Peter McKenzie, that "Titus's motivation is untidy."⁶⁷ The death of the Thing, of Fuchsia, of Flay, the theft of his boat, hatred of Steerpike all contribute in some measure towards Titus's desire for revenge, at a personal level, at the level where he is simply Titus. But the final struggle becomes more than just a personal vendetta. When confronting his mother with his reasons for wanting to kill Steerpike, Titus insists that abstract loyalty has nothing to do with it (p.459). One suspects that he protests too much. Later, as he orders the march on Steerpike, he enjoys "a native authority that was being wielded for the first time" (p.469), and we recall his pride in his earldom when he sees the towers on his return from the Mountain, as a young child. The see-saw of his conflict is explicitly stated as he glides in his canoe, artistic image of the Carvers whom he flouted, sexual image of the Thing who encouraged his defiance, and, finally, the indirect cause of Steerpike's capture. Titus experiences "the terrible antithesis within him -- the tearing in two directions of his heart and head -- the divided loyalties -- the growing and feverish longing to escape from all that was meant by Gormenghast, and the ineradicable, irrational pride in his lineage, and the love, as deep as the hate, which he felt, unwittingly, for the least of the cold stones of his loveless home" (p.438).

The defense of the "loveless home" in the battle that follows becomes an extension and development on a macrocosmic scale of that other momentous gathering together of the Castle on the occasion of Titus's tenth birthday. Now, as epic hero, Titus moves to the centre of the drama that is to effect the rebirth of a pristine world:

He had seen his private world break up. He had seen characters in action. It was now for him to take the limelight. Was he the Earl of Gormenghast? Was he the seventy-seventh? No, by the lightning that killed her! He was the First -- a man upon a crag with the torchlight of the world upon him! (p.488)

Being the First implies a certain courage to wrench oneself away from the old and the stereotyped. The wrench involved is suggested in the final attempt to describe Titus's motives, just before he kills Steerpike:

. . . a kind of power climbed through him like sap. Not the power of Gormenghast, or the pride of lineage. These were but dead-sea fruit. But the power of the imagination's pride. He, Titus, the traitor, was about to prove his existence, spurred by his anger, spurred by the romanticism of his nature which cried not now for paper boats, or marbles, or the monsters on their stilts, or the mountain cave, or the Thing afloat among the golden oaks, or anything but vengeance and sudden death and the knowledge that he was not watching any more, but living at the core of drama. (p.493)

The series of negations in this description suggests, on the one hand, a rejection of all that Titus has experienced, from pride in and love for Gormenghast to enchantment with marbles, monsters and mountains. On the other hand, if knowledge of self and a sense of precious identity comes with painful separation, then this is a moment of truth for Titus -- an assessment of all that has made him ready for this ultimate struggle, a struggle which becomes archetypal in its resonance. Titus thus becomes ready to play his final role in the novel as the avenger of all that is good and enriching, of all that has fed "the power of the imagination's pride" in Gormenghast, just as he is traitor to all that threatens decay. The Castle against which Steerpike rebels is seen through a "jagged star-shaped opening" where the towers float: "The white mist seemed lovelier than ever,

and the towers more fairy-like" (p.390). The Castle against which Titus rebels is covered in ivy like "the long hair of some corpse" (p.101). Similarly, from the point of view of Titus's rebellion, the Tower of Flints is a "blasphemous finger of rock" (TG,p.348), challenging the wide spaces of innocent heaven, but from the point of view of Steerpike's rebellion, it is "a vertical splinter of green fire" and "the steeple of all love" (TG,pp.358-359). What Titus defends when he faces and destroys Steerpike, then, is the Castle as Eden. In the confrontation, Titus takes stock of that moment years ago when he faced in Steerpike "the arch-symbol of all the authority and repression which he loathed" (p.310), and refused to apologize to him. Freud has shown how civilization and order are the result of authority and repression, but the kind Steerpike represents has the "cold and cerebral" quality (p.488) that leads not to civilization, but to dehumanization and, ultimately, regression.⁶⁸ He himself represses the beast in him only to find it betraying him: "His lips, thin as a prude's, had fused into a single bloodless thread" (p.496), and all he wants now is to strut as he did around the Twins' corpses:

His lust was to stand naked upon the moonlit stage, with his arms stretched high, and his fingers spread, and with the warm fresh blood that soaked them sliding down his wrists, spiralling his arms and steaming in the cold night air -- to suddenly drop his hands like talons to his breast and tear it open to expose a heart like a black vegetable -- and then, upon the crest of self-exposure, and the sweet glory of wickedness, to create some gesture of supreme defiance, lewd and rare; and then with the towers of Gormenghast about him, cheat the castle of its jealous right and die of his own evil in the moonbeams. (pp.496-497)

The passage builds up to an orgasmic crescendo as the full horror of Steerpike's regression to unbridled and primitive evil is revealed: "He wallowed in the dawn of the globe" (p.497). The return to the heart of darkness, to savagery is stressed once more as Steerpike sees Titus, "the Lord of Gormenghast" (p.498), and lets out "a note from the first dawn, the high-pitched overweening cry of a fighting cock" (p.498).

It is as Earl and defender of the Castle that Steerpike recognizes his assailant, and it is surely in part as defender of

the world that has made him that Titus attacks. One recalls how he is carried to Steerpike's hiding place in the same chair used for his tenth birthday when the pageant of the Castle's world was played before his delighted eyes, and now, having killed Steerpike, he looks up at his mother:

It seemed that he wished to be sure that she was there above him and was able to see exactly what was happening. For as the body of Steerpike was hauled aboard by the boatmen, he glanced at it and then at her again before a black faint overtook him and his mother's face whirled in an arc, and he fell forward into the boat as though into a trench of darkness. (p.500)

This is Titus's childlike demand for approval from his mother and, implicitly, from Gormenghast, and Gertrude watches the scene with "[t]hat look which she reserved, unknowingly, for a bird with a broken wing" (p.500). In the return to "the dawn of the globe," Titus and Steerpike become the antagonists of "illud tempus." As Steerpike is stabbed to death, Titus ensures the rebirth of the green world, and the description of this world presents a very similar image to that of the rain-washed world that succeeds Titus's Earling: "There was no more rain. The washed air was indescribably sweet. A kind of natural peace almost a thing of the mind, a kind of reverie, descended upon Gormenghast -- descended, it seemed, with the sunbeams by day, and the moonbeams after dark" (p.501). Instead of the disjunct reveries of the Dark Breakfast, the world now shares a common dream. As the entire Castle came together to destroy Steerpike, united before the threat, to resurrect the original purpose of ritual by, paradoxically, moving outside ritual, so now the Castle is brought together in "regenerative labour" and there is a promise that the Castle will be restored to a cleanliness unknown to its inhabitants (p.501).⁶⁹ The petrification of myth and imagination wrought by millennia of automatic performance of the rituals is overcome by the purifying flood waters and the re-enactment of the primordial struggle between the "almost legendary monster" and the "dragon-slayer" (p.505). In the Castle itself, the process of rediscovery continues, the roofs become promenades, and even the ritual is invigorated by poetry as the Poet examines "the problem of Ceremony and the human element" (p.505).

The meditative mood that marks the Castle is finely captured in our last encompassing view of it from the slopes of the Mountain, "an island mad with birdsong" (p.503). The Castle is, as fully, an image of natural beauty and mystery:

From this location the castle could be seen heaving across the skyline like the sheer sea-wall of a continent; a seaboard nibbled with countless coves and bitten deep with shadowy embayments. A continent, off whose shores the crowding islands lay; islands of every shape that towers can be; and archipelagos; and isthmuses and bluffs; and stark peninsulas of wandering stone -- an inexhaustible panorama whose every detail was mirrored in the breathless flood below. (p.504)

Titus has grown beyond this world, however, by being able to see it from a distance, as something to be consciously apprehended, criticized, loved, and it is time for him to move on. We are told that "[h]e was out of key with normality" (p.510), a normality now characterized by "a strangely gentle atmosphere" (p.508), as he sits on the Mountain near Fuchsia's grave in late spring:

And all the while the sweet air swam about him, innocent, delicate, and a single cloud, like a slender hand floated over the castle as though to bless the towers. A rabbit emerged from the shadows of a fern and sat quite still upon a rock. Some insects sang thinly in the air, and suddenly close at hand a cricket scraped away on a single bowstring. (p.508)

This is the world of innocence in which it is fitting that Titus's sister should lie, for her world remained a childlike one to the end. Her story books and her attic world left her unfit to deal with the manipulation of that world by Steerpike, tossing roses on her table and making midnight assignations, wooing her with words and make-believe. In the end that very world of stories, pictures and "let's pretend" leads to her death: ". . . and as the child in her was playing the oldest game in the world, her body, following the course of her imagination, had climbed to the sill of the window where it stood with its back to the room" (pp.453-454). The dislocation of mind and body is very similar to her father's whose private world also proved inadequate to cope with the public world. It is also

noticeable how seldom we see Fuchsia outside the Castle buildings in this novel, as opposed to Titus who appears to have experienced the best of both worlds, and the worst, fitting him for the quest beyond the mythic realm. Indeed, the first time we see Fuchsia she is a picture with the window for a frame and, like a similar image of her mother, this stresses her enclosure within the static world of Gormenghast:

Fuchsia was leaning on her window-sill and staring out over the rough roofs below her. Her crimson dress burned with the peculiar red more often found in paintings than in Nature. The window-frame, surrounding not only her but the impalpable dusk behind her, enclosed a masterpiece. Her stillness accentuated the hallucinatory effect, but even if she were to have moved it would have seemed that a picture had come to life rather than that a movement had taken place in Nature. (p.21)

The stasis of this scene is in sharp contrast to the images of Fuchsia we remember from Titus Groan: the hoydenish young gypsy with her violent shifts of mood and her zest for the beauties of the natural world. The trance-like quality that envelops Fuchsia through much of Gormenghast is a foil to the increasing turmoil and vitality in her brother, itself an echo of the Fuchsia who asserted so defiantly in her attic on Titus's birthday: "I do just what I like here. . . . I know where I go. I go here. This is where I go. . . . And here it is I am. I am here now" (TG,p.82). The assertion of immediacy, however, is countered by the endless repetition, and the passage ends with these words: "This is the present. I'm looking on the roofs of the present and I'm leaning on the present window-sill and later on when I'm older I will lean on this window-sill again. Over and over again" (TG,p.82). Fuchsia cannot move beyond the cyclic pattern and her Ophelia-like death from the window-sill takes place, appropriately, before the ritual of the birthday masque becomes the reality of goal-orientated action, before the passive spectator gazing out of the window is forced to become an actor in the drama.

Similarly, although Gertrude rouses her energies in defense of the Castle, she is so identified with the Castle that it seems more like the instinctive desire for survival and the preservation of her world than the conscious activity of a strategist. During the

crucial struggle in the ivy she is the one who watches from an upper window, and as the flood waters recede she withdraws once more: "She relapsed into a state of self-imposed darkness, lit only by green eyes and the bright backs of birds" (p.506).⁷⁰

This is what Titus cannot return to, and, in leaving his mother, Titus fulfils his promise to the Mountain to move beyond even that centre, to find worlds that are strange, to gallop beyond "the dark margin" on the horse that has been such a potent image in the novel. Its dynamic energy and sexuality are there when we first see Titus riding from the southern walls into the Castle and when we see him riding away from his home. The horse, like the canoe, like the Thing, suggests the combination of physical and imaginative challenge which Titus will have to face anew when he is "Titus Alone."

The last paragraphs are marked by a tension between romantic nostalgia and excited anticipation, between the spirit of the child and the forward-looking spirit of the adult. Northrop Frye points out that "[t]he perennially childlike quality of romance is marked by its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space."⁷¹ In Gormenghast, Peake seems to have presented us with a romance and a bildungsroman in which nostalgia for a mythic world struggles with the desire to grow up. Stasis and mobility are in constant tension as we move through the phases of romance that Frye has isolated: "the innocent youth of the hero," the quest, "the maintaining of the integrity of the innocent world against the assault of experience," the "contemplative withdrawal," and the "penseroso phase" as the moonlight illuminates a towered world.⁷² At the same time we are given a hero whose innocent youth is marked by rebellion and the desire to escape, whose slaying of the dragon fulfils an intensely individualistic aim and whose withdrawal is ultimately not to contemplation but to adventure in a time and space that has cut loose from any mythic moorings.

This is not just Titus's novel, however. It is also a novel in which Peake continually explores the nature of the world he has created, and when Titus leaves, so does his author. The alternative would be to drown with Fuchsia.

INTERLUDE : BOY IN DARKNESS

Published in 1956, together with stories by John Wyndham and William Golding, Boy in Darkness, a disturbing tale, offers an interesting transition from Gormenghast to Titus Alone. John Batchelor maintains that "[t]his story is too dark and pessimistic to have fitted the imaginative world even of Titus Alone."¹ Yet the equivocal triumph of Titus (the Boy) at the end of the story is not all that different from the conclusions to the two novels which it separates, and we find, once again, Peake's curious delight in mingling a quirky sense of humour with scenes of chilling horror.

The action takes place on the occasion of Titus's fourteenth birthday, in that interval when Gormenghast inhaled and "left a vacuum," a "sense of unreality," an "unearthly lull," when all its inhabitants became puppets, part of the dream of the Castle, and Titus was "wading" through his boyhood (GG, pp. 338-343). At fourteen, he has moved beyond childhood into adolescence and the bonds of ritual have become increasingly irksome. His tenth birthday celebrations are the happy contrast to his fourteenth, when "the natural life of the day is bruised and crushed" (p. 181). On the evening of his birthday, Titus returns to his room and gazes at a patch of mildew on the ceiling across which an ant is crawling like "[a]n explorer" (p. 182). Seeing in exploration "something solitary and mutinous" (p. 182), he determines to "escape from the gaols of precedent" (p. 182), yet he still experiences the conflict between his sense of belonging to the Castle and his need to free himself of its bonds:

For there can be a need for hateful things, and a hatred for what is, in a strange way, loved. And so a child flies to what it recognizes for recognition's sake. But to be alone in a land where nothing can be recognized, that is what he feared, and that is what he longed for.
(p. 184)

Thus, Titus hears the call of the Thing, that elusive being, so self-sufficient, who represented for him all that was different from

Gormenghast (as opposed to the call of the Mountain which, to a large extent, is an intrinsic part of the romantic landscape). The ringing of the bells for his birthday and the shrill cries of the children emphasise Titus's separate status and increase his desire for anonymity, and this time he breaks away (as he wanted to do for similar reasons after his tenth birthday masque, but Fuchsia was there, ironically, to stay him).

The boy's flight through the Castle shows him to be as familiar with its secret passages as Steerpike, and also contributes to the ambiguous atmosphere of his home -- its potential for adventurous discovery, the nostalgia of its "faded elegance" (p.186), the "grandeur in decay" (p.187), the familiarity of its shapes, "a jag or jutting that rose to the brink of memory" (p.187), a memory informed by the "collective unconscious" that will haunt Titus in the next novel, so that when he is confronted by an alien landscape he will, as here, feel that he has been "deserted by the outriders of his memory" (p.188). The quality of nightmare marks the rest of the story.

What is noticeable about Titus Groan and Gormenghast (in comparison with the Other Worlds of Tolkien, Lewis and many science fiction writers) is the lack of magic or scientific contrivances that are the modern equivalent. Peake's imaginative world is peopled by human beings and animals that, however peculiar, are recognizable as such. Much of the power of this world derives from a mixture of strangeness and familiarity.² The nightmarish quality of Boy in Darkness derives from its relatively undisplaced use of mythic figures and experiences. Titus clearly embarks on a journey to the Underworld, crossing a river with the aid of Cerberus-like dogs, traversing an inexpressibly dreary wasteland and being confronted by the agony of metamorphosis. His experience in the Hollow Halls appears as a fairly harmless precursor to this experience of the grotesque where changing forms indicate a movement towards final degradation with no hope of regeneration.

The landscape is reminiscent of those images of the post-nuclear holocaust that mark books such as Walter M. Miller Jr.'s A Canticle for Leibowitz and films such as Kon Ichikawa's Fires On the Plain.³ The river is "a wide, sluggish waterway with no trees upon its banks, a featureless, slow-moving stretch of sullen water with the bilious

moonlight glowering on its back" (p.188). Instead of the wonderful, heraldic sea of white cats, Titus is surrounded by hounds who live in "forsaken halls" with eyes that are a "kind of bright and acid yellow. . . ineradicably wicked" (p.189). ⁴ Titus finds himself in "foreign air" (p.189), where heat and dryness induce a drug-like state of "hyperlucidity" ⁵: "His sight appeared to be keener than ever, as though a film had been taken away from his eyes and an odour quite unlike any other began to force itself upon his notice" (p.190). The odour is full of "sweetness" and "menace" (p.190) and presses upon him as the odour of the death factory will do in Titus Alone. Even the sun, the life-giver, is tainted by death and its rays create only a nauseating colourlessness: "The water under the sun's rays was like grey oil that heaved as though with a voluptuous sickness" (p.191). This image, suggesting both disease and sexuality, becomes central to the rest of the story, as Titus is captured by the half-men, half-beasts, Goat and Hyena.

In many ways these two creatures are parodies of characters who move through Gormenghast and prefigure the mockery of that world at the end of Titus Alone. The Goat wears a greasy black suit and his sympathy for Titus and devotion to the Lamb all look back to Flay. He desires "the glory" of taking Titus to his master (p.199) and cries in fear, ". . . Oh. . . my green. . . loins. . . My. . . loins. . . My terrified. . . loins. . . ." (p.213), echoing the Twins and Nannie Slagg respectively. Hyena's swiftness and brutality suggest Steerpike, while his vanity mirrors both Steerpike and Irma. Titus's attempt to woo the creatures by flattery and the promise of thrones parallels Steerpike's manipulation of the Twins and inspires a similar sympathy for the two pathetic creatures (p.229). The Lamb, with its wonderful library and its delight in the pondering of abstractions with the late Spider-man replays Sepulchrave and the Poet, while his perverted lust for debasing others in order to gratify himself again suggests Steerpike.

The reflexiveness of this story is a feature of Titus Alone, but the travesty seems to lead, in both cases, to the, albeit qualified, redemption of a world. In the novella, Titus is, after all, the saviour prince who comes to redeem the wasteland. That the wasteland may be seen as the dark underside of Gormenghast, where metamorphosis is not an image of growth and the rejuvenation of a mythic wholeness

{ where the grotesque is figured in the continual corruption of the human body with no promise of blessed transfiguration at the end, argues that Titus is to save Gormenghast from itself, as he does at the end of the second novel.

What Titus confronts "in darkness," then, is the inverted image of his home and, like the world beyond the looking glass, it can be terrifying and threaten the adventurer's identity. That the Goat appears to be totally alien suggests the fear of the dreamer who refuses to recognize masks of the self that permeate his dreams. At the same time, the difficulty Titus has in pinning down the difference of the Goat anticipates his difficulty in pinning down the difference between Gormenghast and the real world, something that he has to do in order to come to terms with both worlds in Titus Alone:

. . . what was it that made this gentleman so different? His hair was curly and dusty. This was somehow revolting but there was nothing monstrous about it. The head was long and huge. But why should that, in itself, be repellent or impossible? The eyes were pale, and almost pupil-less, but what of that? The pupil was there, though tiny, and there was obviously no need for its enlargement.

(pp.191-192)

The fear of that which is simultaneously strange and familiar is complemented by the disgust at actions which are both innocent and obscene. As Ronald Binns has pointed out, the debased human being that is the Goat mimics the act of masturbation by rubbing his cloven, vagina-like hoof against his thigh, and the implications of homosexual relations between the Goat, the Hyena and the Lamb are quite clear.⁶ The Goat constantly uses endearments when addressing Hyena and the placid way in which he submits to Hyena's brutality also suggests a sado-masochistic element in the relationship:

With one great spring, the sinewy Hyena was upon the Goat and was holding him down. The surge of sheer, malicious, uncontrollable vitality shook his frame as though to shake it to pieces, so that while Hyena held the Goat helpless on its back (for his hands gripped the poor creature by its shoulders) he trod savagely to and fro along the length of his victim, his cruel hands remaining where they were.

(p.198)

The Goat's response to this is, "I know you are stronger than I am. So there is little I can do. . . . After all, you have bullied me for years and years, haven't you?" At this point we read that "he flashed his fatuous smile" (p.199). Titus becomes a voyeur ("The Boy lay quietly watching the brutal scene" p.198), and then panders to the vanity of the creatures. His request that the Goat demonstrate his walk causes the "mirthless, hideous" laugh of Hyena (p.201). Thus, Titus is implicated in the degeneracy of this world.

In supreme control is the blasphemous parody of that symbol of all that is perfect -- the Lamb. Where Christ is sacrificed as a substitute for man, the Lamb is an absolutely evil creature who demands the sacrifice of human kind to satisfy his own lust to debase life. He cannot create it and he cannot sustain it; he can only pervert and destroy it. Sexual perversion and the perversion of the creative spirit meet in the Lamb, as they do in Steerpike. Like Steerpike, the Lamb can barely contain his diabolical vitality and it finds expression when he is alone: "His hands were moving so fast one about another, circling one another, separating, threading and weaving their ten fantastic fingers in such a delirium of movement, that nothing could be seen but an opalescent blur of light that sometimes rose, sometimes sank and sometimes hovered like a mist at the height of the White Lamb's breast" (p.226). As with Steerpike, the lust for sex and power are intertwined and the Lamb performs a similar ritual to the one we see Steerpike perform around the corpses of the Twins:

. . . he turned his long woollen head away and a moment later had followed the path of his blind gaze and was circling the two half-beasts with a kind of strutting action; and as he did this the two creatures collapsed into a kind of decay. They were already travesties of life, but now they were nothing more than the relics of that travesty.

For, as the Lamb minced about them, they gave themselves up to his superior will, their eyes yearning for annihilation.

'When I kiss you,' said the Lamb in the sweetest voice in the world, 'then you will not die. Death is too gentle: death is too enviable: death is too generous. What I will give you is pain. For you have spoken to the Boy -- and he was mine from the first word. You have touched him, and he was mine from the first touch. (p.231)

The bizarre coupling of these distorted desires with a love for

beauty, learning and culture is also reminiscent of Steerpike (and Mr. Slaughterboard). The Castle's monster hated burning the library because the books were beautiful (see TG,p.264), and saw himself paying tribute to his aesthetic sensibilities by burning Barquentine. The Lamb's chief frustration is that the only two mutants to remain alive are "a couple of near-idiot" (p.216) and he is compared to "a pianist manacled, the keyboard before him. Or a famished gourmet unable to reach, but able to see the table spread with delicacies" (p.217).

The deception of Steerpike, attired as a romantic gallant replete with cloak, sword and rose, is seen in a more acute form in the Lamb, the "White Lord of Midnight" (p.213), with its bleating "like innocence or a strain of love from the pastures of sweet April" (p.223):

The breast of the Lamb was like a little sea -- a little sea of curls -- of clustered curls or like the soft white crests of moonlight verdure; verdure white as death, frozen to the eye, but voluptuously soft to the touch -- and lethal also, for to plunge the hand into that breast would be to find there was no substance there, but only the curls of the Lamb -- no ribs, no organs; only the yielding, horrible mollience of endless wool! (p.206)

The use of diminutives and repetition increases the sinister atmosphere and the emphasis on the whiteness of the Lamb recalls the multiple connotations, both good and evil, that Ishmael sees in the whiteness of the whale: ⁷ "White. White as the foam when the moon is full on the sea; white as the white of a child's eye; or the brow of a dead man; white as a sheeted ghost. Oh, white as wool" (p.205).

In killing the Lamb, Titus anticipates, in a world of nightmare, his killing of Steerpike. Indeed the descriptions of the two dead villains convey a similar sense of a reduction to nothingness. In Gormenghast we read:

Then Titus stared at the face, as a child who cannot tell the time will stare at the face of a clock in wonder and perplexity, for it was nothing any more -- it was just a thing, narrow and pale, with an open mouth and small, lack-lustre eyes. (GG,p.499)

This description may be compared with the death of the Lamb:

The Boy then slashed at the woollen body, and at the arms, but it was the same as it had been with the head, a complete emptiness devoid of bones and organs. The wool lay everywhere in dazzling curls. (p.233)

Titus's killing of the Lamb is ridiculously easy: just as common sense comes to Alice's rescue, so a schoolboy's trick comes to the aid of Titus.⁸ There is an ironic appropriateness in the tossing of coins to distract the Lamb who cannot see because his eyes are covered by a "dull blue membrane" and look like two coins (p.205).

At this point, the Hyena and the Goat emerge as "two ancient men," but the restoration is not a joyous one. Just as Titus's sense of his own treachery colours his killing of the traitor Steerpike, so here, his own implication in the diseased world colours his defeat of the Lamb: "They did not talk to one another: they did not talk to the Boy, nor he to them. They led the way along cold galleries; through arches and up the throats of shafts until, in the upper air, they parted without a word" (p.233). In Binns's words, "[t]he story ends in a kind of shameful silence."⁹

At the end of Gormenghast, there is a sense of restoration much more fully realized. We see a world washed clean. Boy in Darkness, like Conrad's Heart of Darkness, ends much more ambivalently with a sense that the penetration into the moral blackness and savagery that underlies order, ritual and control leads to a pervasive sombreness, which no ascent to "the upper air," and no re-crossing of the river can abate. This subdued conclusion points forward in its turn to the world of Titus Alone, where we are not given to feel that Titus is experiencing a nightmare from which he will awaken. The moral vacuity and the threat that evil energy will annihilate his kingdom are realities which he has to face with full consciousness.

In Peake's last novel we find Titus arriving in a city via a river, he crosses a wasteland and confronts pure evil in the form of Veil (in an underworld) and Cheeta. The Goat is positively transformed in the loyal "Three," Hyena parallels Veil and Cheeta, and the Lamb looks forward to the scientist. It is the last parallel that is most interesting, for it points to one of the central concerns

of the last novel: technology as the diabolical villain. Boy in Darkness presents technology as life-destroying, uncontrollable, with an aura of incalculable mystery. Titus travels "[t]o the heart of the terrain where deep in the silence stood the Warehouses" (p.195):

Far away beyond the power of search, in the breathless wastes, where time slides on and on through the sickness of day and the suffocation of night, there was a land of absolute stillness -- a stillness of breath indrawn and held in the lungs -- the stillness of apprehension and a dire suspense.

And at the heart of this land or region, where no trees grew, and no birds sang, there was a desert of grey space that shone with a metallic light. (p.203)

This is the landscape of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" after the bomb. 10
At the centre is no mysterious, tender, hateful, beautiful, hideous castle, no romantic and wondrous mountain, but "a field of naked stone" (pp.203-204): "Scattered indiscriminately across this field was what looked like the chimneys or shafts of old metal workings, mine-heads, and littered here and there in every direction, girders and chains. And over it all the light shone horribly on metal and stone" (p.204). The relationship between the deserted metal world and the experiments on human beings to create a utopia is implied in a later passage:

There had been a time when these deserted solitudes were alive with hope, excitement and conjecture on how the world was to be changed! But that was far beyond the skyline. All that was left was a kind of shipwreck. A shipwreck of metal. It spiralled; it took great arcs; it rose tier upon tier; it overhung vast wells of darkness; it formed gigantic stairs which came from nowhere and led nowhere. It led on and on; vistas of forgotten metal; moribund, stiff in a thousand attitudes of mortality; with not a rat, not a mouse; not a bat, not a spider. (p.206)

The metal labyrinth inverts the crumbling ivy-covered labyrinth. Where the Castle succours the animals, the metal world not only refuses shelter but in Titus Alone completely destroys them, by means of "[s]ome kind of ray" (TA,p.142). The vagueness of Muzzlehatch's description is echoed by the Lamb's inability to comprehend the

process by means of which he effects the metamorphoses, "for the whole process of transmutation was of so occult a nature that even the Lamb found it impossible to know what it was that killed them and what it was that kept them alive" (p.208). It is not simply the psychic power of the Lamb that transmutes human beings: transmutation and destruction seem to centre on the connection between the obsessive will and the "shipwreck of metal" (p.206).

The story demonstrates, at this level, the horror that can succeed man's attempt to re-create the world in his own image, so that, to repeat an earlier quote, he "remains a Narcissus staring at his own reflection. . . unable to surpass himself."¹¹ Titus flees the "gaols of precedent" (p.182) only to find that he enters a world where "one by one, they had all died, for the experiments were without precedent" (p.207). It is this paradox that Titus is to confront in the last of Peake's novels.

CHAPTER FOUR : TITUS ALONE "GROTTOED NO LONGER"

A marble spinning through the universe
Wears on its dizzy crust, men, houses, trees
That circle through cavernous aeons, and I was afraid.¹

The writing of Titus Alone was fraught with difficulty owing to Peake's deterioration in health. Parkinson's disease was slowly and remorselessly eating away at his control over mind and hand as he set out to write of Titus outside Gormenghast, to show him surviving beyond the walls of his shadowy home, just as he, the author, was trying to come to terms with the world outside his imagination. Having returned from the haven of isolation on Sark, the Peakes settled in a large Queen Anne house, The Grange, in Smarden. Further financial difficulties made necessary the move to the old house in Wallington, Surrey where Peake had grown up, and which was bequeathed to him by his father. He lived there from 1952 to 1960, that is, for the remainder of his creative life.

Thus, Peake returns home -- but not quite, for to return home would be to return to China, behind the Great Wall, to the navel of the earth. Similarly, Titus does not return to the Castle, but only as far as the Mountain, bearing with him an accumulation of experiences and perceptions that must lead him to a fresh assimilation of his past. For Peake, too, the process of assimilation is important as he wrestles with a frightening post-war world. In his last novel, he seems to be acutely aware of the terror of Cold War, and the awesome threat of nuclear bombs. He sees, too, an age marked by the rapidly increasing dependence on industry and technology.

By bringing Titus into this world, Peake, as literary midwife, delivers him from the womb of myth, "the matrix of the postnatal gestation of the placental Homo sapiens," but, as Joseph Campbell points out in the same article, "Bios and Mythos: Prolegomena to a Science of Mythology," "[m]isbirth is possible from the mythological womb as well as from the physiological: there can be adhesions, malformations, arrestations, etc. We call them neuroses and psychoses."²

The fear of a fractured identity and the threat of alienation that Titus experiences clearly suggest this kind of "misbirth" into a world outside the mythic universe of Gormenghast. Nevertheless, if Titus is to grow into manhood, it is vital that he pursue that quest outside the boundaries of his home, just as Peake's credibility as a mature artist depends as much on his ability to perceive the real world as it does on his ability to create fictional worlds. As Titus emerges from myth into history, so the artist emerges from the circus into the world of which it is an image. In his attack on the modern "craze for myth," Philip Rahv asserts that "[i]n literature the withdrawal from historical experience and creativeness can only mean stagnation. For the creative artist to deny time in the name of the timeless and immemorial is to misconceive his task. He will never discover a shortcut to transcendence. True, in the imaginative act the artist does indeed challenge time, but in order to win he must also be able to meet its challenge; and his triumph over it is like that blessing which Jacob exacted from the angel only after grappling with him till the break of day." ³ Titus Alone is clearly Peake's attempt to meet the challenge of time, and the experience of his hero is seen throughout the book in terms of a yearning for the security of myth and a contrasting determination to move through time. The tension, as Rahv points out, is a distinctly modern one:

It seems as if in the modern world there is no having done with romanticism -- no having done with it because of its enormous resourcefulness in accommodating the neo-primitivistic urge that pervades our culture, in providing it with objects of nostalgia upon which to fasten and haunting forms of the past that it can fill with its own content. And the literary sensibility, disquieted by the effects of the growing division of labour and the differentiation of consciousness, is of course especially responsive to the vision of the lost unities and simplicities of times past. Now myth, the appeal of which lies precisely in its archaism, promises above all to heal the wounds of time. For the one essential function of myth stressed by all writers is that in merging past and present it releases us from the flux of temporality, arresting change in the timeless, the permanent, the ever-recurrent conceived as "sacred repetition." Hence the mythic is the polar opposite of what we mean by the historical, which stands for process, inexorable change, incessant permutation and innovation. Myth is reassuring in its stability, whereas history is

that powerhouse of change which destroys custom and tradition in producing the future -- the future that at present, with the fading away of the optimism of progress, many have learned to associate with the danger and menace of the unknown. In our time the movement of history has been so rapid that the mind longs for nothing so much as something permanent to steady it. Hence what the craze for myth represents most of all is the fear of history.⁴

The connection between fear of the "powerhouse of change" and the fear of the machine controlling man -- his time, his personal and his social identity -- is seen in a vast number of modern works of art from the novels of Mann and Joyce, to films such as Chaplin's Modern Times (in which he is literally eaten by a machine) and Fritz Lang's Metropolis.⁵ Michel Zeraffa, writing on Fictions, quotes the following question: "How can one resolve the problems of a society that has become a formidable machine grinding humanity to dust?" and concludes that "to the nightmare of history is added the nightmare of industrial society which takes on the appearance of a clanking robot."⁶

Of course, this horror of technology goes back to the nineteenth century. In Dickens's Hard Times the world of the circus counterpoints the trumpeting steel elephants of Coketown. In Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles, the monstrous threshing machine shakes Tess into numbness. Johan Huizinga has suggested that, from one point of view, the nineteenth century is marked by the ethic of "all work and no play":

Work and production became the ideal, and then the idol, of the age. All Europe donned the boiler-suit. Henceforth the dominants of civilization were to be social consciousness, educational aspirations, and scientific judgement. With the enormous development of industrial power, advancing from the steam-engine to electricity, the illusion gains ground that progress consists in the exploitation of solar energy. . . . The grotesque over-estimation of the economic factor was conditioned by our worship of technological progress, which was itself the fruit of rationalism and utilitarianism after they had killed the mysteries and acquitted man of guilt and sin. But they had forgotten to free him of folly and myopia, and he seemed only fit to mould the world after the pattern of his own banality.⁷

In Titus Alone, those who reject the ideals of rationalism and utilitarianism have to flee into the "dark circus," the Under-River, a chiaroscuro world that is an outrage to the glittering city perched above the ground. Consequently, the idea of change as something positive, exciting, longed-for becomes the fear of change as a force for material and technological dehumanization and, finally, the destruction of life.

As Titus moves into this world, his heroic identity undergoes a certain transformation. By entering history, time, the world of change wrought by the machine and the scientist, he loses his epic and mythic stature. We have seen how he is closely identified, as "untarnished child-shaped mirror" (TG,p.12), with the mythic world of Gormenghast in the first novel, the story about a god. In the second novel, the story is more specifically about the way the hero responds to the god, and the tension between love and antagonism makes Titus at once the epic hero of his community and the Romantic hero who moves away from that community. As epic hero, he has affinities with the archetypal mythological hero of whom Joseph Campbell writes in The Hero With a Thousand Faces: "The passage of the mythological hero may be overground, incidentally; fundamentally it is inward -- into depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost, forgotten powers are revived, to be made available for the transfiguration of the world."⁸ At this level, Titus's experiences all contribute to making of him a courageous, passionate, imaginative individual who carries in him the spirit of regeneration. Thus he is carried, as Earl, on the throne used on his tenth birthday to take his place, spotlighted on the centre of the stage, in the scene of the final struggle for the heart of Gormenghast. The novel shows how a tension develops between the static world of myth and the romance world that it contains, enabling the hero to embark on a journey of self-discovery through adventure, quest and the slaying of the dragon. The danger is that this romance world suggests something beyond itself and, in responding to this suggestion, Titus finds it impossible to be completely fulfilled in his role as epic hero. As Paul Zweig points out: "Epic tells the story of the demonic character who learns slowly, perhaps tragically, that his final allegiance must not be to his own crazy needs, but to the shared vision of the culture which reveres him, and fears him. Epic

describes the essential cultural act: the capturing and taming of forbidden energies." ⁹ Insofar as Steerpike represents these "forbidden energies," Titus performs "the essential cultural act," but he refuses "final allegiance" to Gormenghast in the desire to express his own forbidden energies and so becomes the counter-cultural figure. He must keep his promise to all that the Thing represents -- everything outside Gormenghast, everything tabooed by the sheltering community.

Georg Lukács, writing about "Integrated Civilizations," says that in the world of the epic "[t]he soul goes out to seek adventure; it lives through adventures, but it does not know the real torment of seeking and the real danger of finding; such a soul never stakes itself; it does not yet know that it can lose itself, it never thinks of having to look for itself." ¹⁰ Titus has had this kind of experience throughout Gormenghast and it is because his imagination has moved beyond the world presented in the novel that these "epic" adventures are insufficient. He wants to face the challenge of "the real torment of seeking and the real danger of finding," the real horror of the loss of the self, and the real joy of its recovery.

In Gormenghast, Titus moves between identification with and isolation from the Stones. In Titus Alone, his isolation, his status as outsider is fully confronted. Here, his status as mythic and epic hero is radically undermined by a modern deracinated world and his affinity with the Romantic hero of the nineteenth century and the ironic hero of the twentieth becomes ever clearer. As Romantic outcast, he carries in him a world that few around him really believe in, an imaginative world from which he draws spiritual sustenance in a violently despiritualized society. In this way, he is very like the Romantic outcast as artist whom R.F. Brissenden describes as a development of the sentimental hero:

The myth of the unloved, misunderstood, agonized and alienated artist is a romantic myth; and it is intimately related to, is in part perhaps a variant of, the myth of the virtuous but impotent man of sentiment. Both grow out of the conviction that it is either impossible or immensely difficult to bridge the gap between innocence and experience, to bring about the marriage of heaven and hell. And since the end of the eighteenth century the writer in the

European tradition has become increasingly preoccupied with the theme of the dislocated, deracinated, powerless artist: the theme, in other words, of virtue -- literary, artistic, cultural virtue -- in distress." 11

Titus's negative activity in the last novel also links him with the sentimental hero: "While the picaroon, or the hero of a renaissance tragedy, attempts to shape the world and other people to his purpose, the sentimental hero is usually depicted as struggling to prevent other people from forcing him to do the things they want." 12

As ironic hero, on the other hand, Titus moves through the world of "bondage, frustration and absurdity" and becomes the "incongruously ironic" scapegoat of a community which cannot tolerate "the kingdom in his head" (p.195), the vision of something vaster and older and ultimately more powerful than factories and aeroplanes. 13 But for the greater part of the novel, Titus has to confront the factories and the aeroplanes and the society that revolves around them and recognize that they are

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

and a part of a spiritually barren waste threatened by dissolution. 14
In the face of this Titus must find the "courage to be" and becomes part of the tradition of alienated heroes that extends, in this century, from Meursault, the "outsider," to Yossarian who finds that his final responsibility is to himself, to the ragged wanderer through a bloodshot world in Kosinski's grim vision of war-torn Europe, to James Dean's "rebel without a cause" and Bob Dylan's "ragged clown":

You hand in your ticket
And you go watch the geek
Who immediately walks up to you
When he hears you speak
And says, 'How does it feel
To be such a freak?'
And you say, 'Impossible'
As he hands you a bone

Because something is happening here
But you don't know what it is
Do you, Mister Jones? 15

In Titus Alone, the question "Who is the freak?" is asked with renewed intensity. It is a question to which it is crucial that Titus find the answer as the community tries to pin the label on him.

If Titus becomes a scapegoat figure for a technologically advanced and imaginatively retarded society, it stands to reason that that society should be described, not with the lush prose and rolling periods, the grandeur of setting and the splendour of action of Titus Groan and Gormenghast, but with something starker. As a fantasist who questions the tenets of realism, it also stands to reason that Peake would not choose to describe the modern age by means of realism but by adapting fantasy, romance, the marvellous to express his vision of that age. This places him in the company of other post-war fabulators such as John Hawkes, William Golding and Kurt Vonnegut.

Clearly, one way of adapting fabulation to a technological world is by using elements of science fiction. This is what Peake does, suggesting in the process both the qualitative and the quantitative reduction that marks the move from the world of Gormenghast to the modern age. Adapting Lukács's theory of the novel as descendent of the epic, Patrick Parrinder suggests that "[t]he characteristic relationship of many SF stories to the older epics is. . . one of truncation or frustration. If the events that they portray are of epic magnitude, the manner of their portrayal is brief and allegorical. . . ." ¹⁶ They are allegorical in a distinctly modern way, for allegory has shown a similar movement from the richness and variety of The Faerie Queene to the bleak enigmatic world of The Trial. As Gay Clifford points out: "The allegorical action in modern works is at once more obscure, in the sense that it is almost impossible to ascertain its ultimate meaning, and at the same time allusions to mythology, history, theology, become less frequent as allegories lose their confident encyclopaedism, their role as books of knowledge and counsel, and become more exclusively personal Odysseys." ¹⁷

In Peake's three novels we find, thus, a movement from telling stories by means of static tableaux or great set battles, voluble description, lengthy digression (as if he is trying to fit the whole

world into the novel), and deviation from straightforward chronology, creating temporal labyrinths, to a fragmented, episodic structure, an increase in dialogue (that is, the dramatic rather than the descriptive presentation of character) and a corresponding reduction of descriptions of landscape to an accumulation of "broken images."¹⁸ As with modernist texts such as The Waste Land, it is for Titus (and the reader) to make a meaningful pattern out of these fragments. Thus, although the fragmentation of Titus Alone is partly the result of the author's illness, it can also be seen as an attempt to express what Zeraffa calls "an aesthetic of disintegration" as Peake meditates on the breakdown of traditional structures, artistic and social, in the mid-twentieth century and as he tests the world of the imagination against that breakdown.

Science fiction is not only a way of portraying a "truncated" world of experience; it also structures that world. It is closely linked to the structural features of romance which "tends to prefer action to character," as Richard Chase contends: "The romance can flourish without providing much intricacy of relation. The characters, probably rather two-dimensional types, will not be complexly related to each other or to society or to the past. Human beings will on the whole be shown in ideal relation -- that is, they will share emotions only after these have become abstract or symbolic."¹⁹ Through abstraction and symbolism, science fiction may perform one of the functions of romance, that is, to distance, even distort, the real world in order to see it more clearly. In Titus Alone, we have an almost schematized vision of the world of skyscrapers, air traffic, lethal weapons and the eugenics factory, countered by the Dickensian underworld of poets and dreamers, the animal world and the heroic world of arm-to-arm combat. The characters are suitably ranged on the side of evil or good, depending on their capacity for natural emotion and an imaginative response to the world. (This dichotomy may be compared with the most recent of the Star Wars films²⁰ where the audience claps with delight to see the small, natural bear-like creatures of the forest destroy, with bow and arrow, the giant steel robots with their laser beams).

In a book that wishes to highlight the "terror of history" and the "nightmare of technology," it makes sense that science fiction should be used.²¹ Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin have pointed out

that

science fiction could begin to exist as a literary form only when a different future became conceivable by human beings -- specifically a future in which new knowledge, new discoveries, new adventures, new mutations, would make life radically different from the familiar patterns of the past and present. Once it becomes possible to think in this way, the division between realism and fantasy begins to fade, and we can see that realism depends upon a view of the world that largely ignores the future. 22

The dystopias that succeeded World War I showed that looking to the future, confronting novelty, is not always a happy activity, for "change is frightening, and the likelier it is the more frightening it becomes becomes." ²³ Frank Herbert, author of the Dune series, also sees change as fearful: "Much of our lives we're breaking camp from one set of known surroundings and heading off into an unknown Other Place which we hope will become just as familiar as today's surroundings. That's the stuff of science fiction and it is, as well, the stuff of world crises. . . . Remember the old Chinese curse: 'May you live in interesting times.'" ²⁴ Insofar as Peake presents the world of change as a dystopia, he is in line with a large proportion of twentieth century fiction writers. In the words of Parrinder: "The 'other worlds' of science fiction must always be positively or negatively valued in relation to our own. In the twentieth century, a negative valuation -- realized in visions of totalitarian states, a dying Earth, crumbling empires of barbarous and hostile planets -- has been the rule. Various commentators have seen this as involving the dire forecast of a new 'new dark age.'" ²⁵

Dystopic fiction, however, is not merely concerned with portraying the horror of change. It also presents us with a "paraxial" vision of our world in order to encourage fresh perceptions of that world and to offer ways of dealing with a scientific, time-controlled age. ²⁶ It acknowledges the importance of learning to cope with change and crisis, rather than running away. Of course, many science fiction writers see change as the "powerhouse" of dynamic hope for a future world. Robert Heinlein eulogizes as follows: " I think that science fiction, even the corniest of it, even the most outlandish of it, no matter how badly it's written, has a distinct therapeutic value because all

of it has as its primary postulate that the world does change." ²⁷

Titus thus treads the tightrope between the excitement of a linear temporal experience where no action is repeatable, an experience that breaks out of the mythic cycle of determinism, and the longing for the comfort of that cyclic experience -- change can be both blessing and curse. This tension is noticeable mainly in the early chapters of the book, however. It gradually disappears in favour of a wholly negative vision of the world outside Gormenghast and a corresponding idealization of the Castle. This does not necessarily mean, though, that Peake advocates a simple return to the womb. As will be seen, his goal is one of synthesis.

It has been suggested that science fiction both portrays and structures a changing and, in many ways, disintegrating world. In Titus Alone we find short fragments of chapters, brief undeveloped impressions of people and places, or sustained descriptions of groups of people pictured as a collage of incongruities. ²⁸ On the other hand, there is an overall symmetrical control that suggests an overarching vision. Titus's emergence from the river at the beginning of the book is countered by his ascent of the Mountain at the end. A party and a trial introduce him into society at the beginning and expel him at the end. His love affair with Juno in the first half is opposed by the destructiveness of his relationship with Cheeta in the second. At the very centre is his descent into the underworld. Each experience is marked by a pattern of capture and escape and each escape is effected with the help of Muzzlehatch. Northrop Frye has commented on the frequency with which "the convention of escape" appears in romance, suggesting that "we may sometimes feel that there is something illusory about the dungeon or whatever: however dark and thick-walled, it seems bound to turn into a womb of rebirth sooner or later." ²⁹ The womb as a place of rebirth, a point of departure is clearly connected to the flight from women in the book, as Titus re-enacts his primal flight from his mother. On two occasions, Titus is "rescued" by women -- Juno takes care of him after the first trial and Cheeta cares for him when he is racked by fever. In both cases the rescue turns into another form of imprisonment, and both women are (albeit marginally) connected with social groups. Thus, as in the traditional adventure story, we find the action of Titus Alone developing "as if, at some level, it were a ceremony whose

purpose was to ward off the binding power of the woman -- and, by extension, of the community itself. . . ." ³⁰ Zweig sees the adventurer's life as "a flight into danger, as if he were pursued by an enemy which he feared more than danger itself. . . . Because he cannot cope with the erotic and social hegemony of women, he flees them even into death." ³¹

The need to be identified with something or someone else and the fear of losing his identity was the controlling tension of Titus's experiences in Gormenghast. In Titus Alone, in the pattern of capture and escape, death and rebirth, he re-enacts the archetypal drama outside the walls of his home, without the certainty that Gormenghast and his mother will be waiting for him when he returns. At the most general level, then, the book rests on the tension between the cherishing of freedom and the growing awareness of the need for roots. Thus, the constantly forward-looking Cheeta and her father (like Steerpike) represent the dangers of a loss of the past. For them life means "experiment without precedent," the freedom to make themselves, which becomes the freedom to realize themselves through parasitism because they have nothing else. ³² Juno and Muzzlehatch, on the contrary, have a sense of the value of the past. They have a sense of something that partakes of more than their own images and with this value for the past they are able to sympathize with Titus's longing for his lost world.

The lostness that Titus feels is emphasised by the hammer-blow repetition of "gone" in the opening paragraph, stressing the irrevocable nature of his departure from Gormenghast, while the gentler rhythm of the succeeding line implies the softening of Titus's heart towards his home:

Gone was the outline of his mountainous home. Gone that
torn world of towers. Gone the grey lichen; gone the black
ivy. Gone was the labyrinth that fed his dreams. Gone
ritual, his marrow and his bane. Gone boyhood. Gone.

It was no more than a memory now; a slur of the tide;
a reverie, or the sound of a key, turning. (p.9)

The slight pause before the last word is very suggestive, as it emphasises the word "turning" which describes Titus's movement in the book as he turns back in a slow and continuous motion to

Gormenghast. That this is to be the author's self-exploration as well as Titus's is made clear in the call, "Come out of the shadows, traitor, and stand upon the wild brink of my brain!" (p.9). For Peake, this book becomes an anguished meditation on the nature and value of Gormenghast and all it represents, as well as on the question of culpability -- who betrays whom, in the final analysis? The tension between the author's contiguity to Gormenghast and Titus's distance from it is also captured in the call to Titus -- Peake and Gormenghast both call to him, Peake sees the storm roaring through the Castle and the swaying rocking-horse. But Titus "only knows that he has left behind him, on the far side of the skyline, something inordinate; something brutal; something tender; something half real; something half dream; half of his heart; half of himself" (pp.9-10).

From this point Peake joins Titus and we have no more authorial visions of the Castle as it is; we only see it through the mists of memory. It is as if, in that last accumulation of "broken images" Peake tries to capture the spirit of Gormenghast, to shore fragments against the ruins of his imaginative world. As nature wept for the death of the Thing, so it weeps now for a vanished land: "The sun sank with a sob and darkness waded in from all horizons so that the sky contracted and there was no more light left in the world, when, at this very moment of annihilation, the moon, as though she had been waiting for her cue, sailed up the night" (p.10). It is clear from much of Peake's writing that he was very suspicious of the moon, variously described as a "nail of sin" or full of "fatuous vacancy." 33 The presence of the moon with "its vile hypocrisy" evidently bodes no good for Titus, as he spits at it and shouts, "Liar!" (p.11), and it seems to prefigure the lies and hypocrisy of the society in which he will soon find himself. The "hyena laughter," the leit-motif of the first two chapters (pp.10-11), is also an ill omen. It recalls the terrible laughter of Hyena in Boy in Darkness:

There is a kind of laughter that sickens the soul.
Laughter when it is out of control: when it screams and
stamps its feet, and sets the bells jangling in the next
town. Laughter in all its ignorance and its cruelty.
Laughter with the seed of Satan in it. It tramples upon
shrines; the belly-roarer. It roars, it yells, it is
delirious: and yet it is as cold as ice. It has no

humour. It is naked noise and naked malice, and such
was Hyena. (BD,p.196)

As Bakhtin has pointed out, this is one kind of laughter -- "destructive humour" and like the negative vision of the grotesque, it promises no regeneration. This is laughter that simply destroys and "loses its gay and joyful tone."³⁴ This is also the laughter of Veil and it is a laughter that Titus, as he approaches the abyss of human experience, counteracts by means of a very different kind of laughter.

This is to anticipate. As we find Titus now, we are immediately made aware of the conflict between "remorse" (p.11) and his need to define himself by means of his talisman, a "small knuckle of flint" from the Tower of Flints (p.11), and his sense of wonder at the world around him, the city "with the domes and spires of silver; with shimmering slums; with parks and arches and a threading river" (p.12). Compounded with this sense of wonder is his sense of being the eternal outcast as the two sinister helmeted men make their appearance and we are given a brief glimpse of the pattern of capture and escape that has marked Titus's wandering:". . . it was always the same -- the sudden appearance, the leap of evasion, and the strange following silence as his would-be captors dwindled away into the distance, to vanish. . . but not for ever" (p.13).³⁵ The mixture of vulnerability and aggression that has always characterized Titus is seen once more as he lies in "his moon-bright cradle" and mutters:

'Wake up, you bloody city. . . bang your bells!
I'm on my way to eat you!' (p.14)

The echoes of legendary heroes (for example, Moses) become ironic as Titus finds himself in a modern age that has lost its need for the community hero, where the only heroes are those outside the law, beyond the pale of a frivolous society. Such a one is Muzzlehatch whose name both suits him and does not suit him. At one point Titus pleads with him to speak "with fewer words" (p.107), yet when his mind is set on some fell purpose he is as swift, silent and lethal as a panther. The appearance of his car comes as something of a shock as it verifies beyond doubt that this is no longer an archaic

community, despite the animal-drawn carriages. At the same time, the car serves rather to stress Muzzlehatch's outlaw status than to identify him with the technological society. It is as vital as any of his animals: "Its bonnet was the colour of blood. Its water was boiling. It snorted like a horse and shook itself as though it were alive" (p.14). Its owner lashes it to a mulberry tree in his courtyard (p.19) and later ties her to "the unfinished monument half-erected to some all but forgotten anarchist," for she is "apt at unforeseeable moments to leap a yard or so in a kind of reflex, the water bubbling in her rusty guts": "And there she stood lash'd and twitching. The very personification of irritability" (p.152).

Muzzlehatch himself is clearly out of place in this washed-out society with its bedraggled people drifting down to fish in the river. He is huge, rudder-nosed, supremely self-sufficient, yet full of a (grudging) compassion for all the failures and the under-dogs of the earth. When he stretches himself, he is "like some oracle, directing the sun and moon to keep their distance" (p.15), but, like the prophets of old, he is out of sympathy with the ruling ways of life. He is more earthy, more savage with a primordial love and cruelty that expresses itself in the ambivalent way in which he treats his animals and the human beings who penetrate beneath his sublime indifference. He rescues the boy, Titus, because "it has a pulse" (p.16); the living creature wins his attention. Yet Titus is placed in a room "lined with glass cases, where, beautifully pinned to sheets of cork, a thousand moths spread out their wings in a great gesture of crucifixion" (p.20), recalling the oracular stance of Muzzlehatch earlier, and in that way proleptic of his final sacrifice, a sacrifice partly motivated by his love for those very animals who are his chief joy in life, yet who shriek their resentment at being caged. Their cages are, of course, also an image of the restrictions under which the dynamic Muzzlehatch must live. He is an anomalous Tarzan turning the hose on the titanic struggle of mule and camel: "In that camel were all the camels that had ever been. Blind with a hatred far beyond its own power to invent, it fought a world of mules; of mules that since the dawn of time have bared their teeth at their intrinsic foe" (p.22). The archetypal struggle between intrinsic foes echoes Titus's struggle for the heart of the Castle and prefigures Muzzlehatch's destruction of the scientist in order to redeem the heart of the world, for the scientist has

created a world where a man who stands naked and reprimands his animals can only be considered a crank. In Gormenghast he would simply have been a counterpart to Gertrude with her sea of cats. In a revealing comment, Peake argued against the notion that the obsession of Gertrude for her cats has something neurotic about it:

. . . I feel that these days people talk a lot about neurosis and that people are neurotic; quite apart from the fact there's been a war and a lot of mental trouble has ensued; but I feel in a very large number of cases it's more that the idea of extreme individualism, perhaps in the Dickensian sense, is classified under that heading. I mean, in the old days they talked about a strong personality; now they talk about a psychological kink. . . . I feel that if [Gertrude] hadn't allowed herself to have all these cats, she would become neurotic -- I mean there's the very fact. . . . That's why people are neurotic, 'cos they're frightened of going down the street with fifty cats following them. 36

It becomes clear that in the world outside Gormenghast, so much like our own, the "strong personality" is obliged to retreat from the public world and create his own private world (unlike the characters in Gormenghast, however, this society rejects "eccentricity"). Within Muzzlehatch's courtyard "[t]he tropics burned and broke in ancient loins. Phantom lianas sagged and dripped with poison," while the man himself becomes an incongruous blend of the modern and the primaeval as he sits astride a stag, "a creature as powerful and gaunt as its rider" (p.25). He is an "intellectual ruffian," who looks like "some ravaged god," and whose head is "like a challenge or a threat to all decent citizens" (p.26), the "decent citizens" with bowler hats and umbrellas who stare and then laugh at Pegasus in Victoria Station. This image of overwhelming vitality seems curiously at odds with the speech he makes to Titus, a mini-lecture that makes him a kind of unconsciously self-appointed teacher to the boy. His dislike of officialdom would find an answering echo in Titus's heart, but the assurance that death presides over all mirrors the Philosopher and Deadyawn in Gormenghast:

'... I dislike the police. I dislike their feet. I dislike that whiff of leather, oil and fur, camphor and

blood. I dislike officials, who are nothing, my dear boy, but the pip-headed, trash-bellied putrid scranne! of earth. Out of darkness it is born.'

'What is?' said Titus.

'There is no point in erecting a structure,' said Muzzlehatch, taking no notice of Titus's question, 'unless someone else pulls it down. There is no value in a rule until it is broken. There is nothing in life unless there is death at the back of it. Death, dear boy, leaning over the edge of the world and grinning like a boneyard.'

(pp.26-27)

On the one hand, this seems smug, pontificating and nihilistic. On the other, seen in the context of Muzzlehatch's passionate love for all living things, it comes close to the kind of existentialism which, acknowledging that death is the one certainty, defies it heroically by encouraging one to live the fullness of every moment. The contrast between the dynamic zest for living and the monumental splendour of Muzzlehatch and the vapid attenuated superficiality of the society around him is quite obvious when he rescues Titus from the party. His stand against the "collective Soul," the "dried-up turd of a Soul" terrifies the ladies with their "false bosoms and ignorant mouths" (p.53), and Acreblade the policeman is helpless before Muzzlehatch's tirade:

'Don't you ever have a holiday from crime? Do you never pick up the world as a child picks up a crystal globe -- a thing of many colours? Do you never love this ridiculous world of ours? The wicked and the good of it? The thieves and angels of it? The all of it? Throbbing, dear policeman, in your hand? And knowing how all this is inevitably so, and that without the dark of life you would be out on your ear? Yet see how you take it. Passports, visas, identification papers -- does all this mean so much to your official mind that you must needs bring the filthy stink of it to a party? Open up the gates of your brain then, policeman dear, and let a small sprat through.'

(pp.53-54)

The heavy condescension and sarcasm of Muzzlehatch's words suggest Peake's own violent repugnance for the world of bureaucracy, and the way in which it annihilates the spirit of play and wonder. In Muzzlehatch's every movement the energy of a love for life is seen, be it in his deceptively relaxed attitude behind the wheel of his car, or his half-closed eyes at Titus's trial, when he is fully awake

while the rest of the court are half-asleep, or in his running down the corridors of Lady Cusp-Canine's house, with his pet monkey on his shoulder (so different in implication from the ape that sits on Steerpike's shoulder): "Covering the ground at speed Muzzlehatch retained a monumental self-assurance -- almost a dignity. It was not mere flight. It was a thing in itself, as a dance must be, a dance of ritual" (p.55). If it is ritual, it is the ritual of Pan or Dionysus.

Titus is, predictably, fascinated by this miraculous being, and his perception that the man does not seem to belong to "this glassy region" (p.56) is quite accurate. Muzzlehatch belongs with "the slums," "the crowds," "the stink," his "bitch" of a car (p.56). But more than this, he belongs to another world, another age of legend, romance and adventure. If he is a misplaced Tarzan, he is also a misplaced Long John Silver: ³⁷

'I am still here, or some of me is. The rest of me is leaning on the rails of a ship. The air is full of spices and the deep salt water shines with phosphorus. I am alone on deck and there is no one else to see the moon float out of a cloud so that a string of palms is lit like a procession. I can see the dark-white surf as it beats upon the shore; and I see, and I remember, how a figure ran along the strip of moonlit sand, with his arms raised high above his head, and his shadow ran beside him and jerked as it sped, for the beach was uneven; and then the moon slid into the clouds again and the world went black.'

'Who was he?' said Titus.

'How should I know?' said Muzzlehatch. 'It might have been anyone. It might have been me.' (pp.56-57)

This poignant passage, "mixing / Memory and desire," suggests the reason for Muzzlehatch's response to Titus. ³⁸ He cannot understand why he is helping the boy ("Why should he be interested in the comings and goings of this young vagabond?" p.87), but they each have a "kingdom in the head" (p.195), an imaginative world that offers both a challenge and an alternative to the real world in which they find themselves, and an enrichment of that world. Both experience the fear that the inner world will go black, that it will prove to be a vain delusion, a fraud, and leave them stranded in absurdity, "spreadeagled in the empty air / of existence." It is partly this fear of the vulnerability of dreams that prevents both Titus and Muzzlehatch

from committing themselves too completely to other people and creating idylls that can so easily be shattered. Thus, Muzzlehatch turns his love for Juno into a Nonsense song to protect himself:

'But ah! the palms of yesterday --
 There's not a soul from yesterday
 Who's worth the dreaming of -- they say --
 Who's worth the dreaming of. . . ' (p.65)

He tries to protect himself from Titus with flippant dismissiveness: ". . . the Earl of Gorgon-paste or whatever he calls himself -- I must wash my hands of him also, for I have no desire to be involved with yet another human being -- especially one in the shape of an enigma" (p.59). There is an endearing honesty about Muzzlehatch as he admits that much of the blame for shattered dreams rests with him: "What had gone wrong? Was it that they need no longer try because they could see through one another? What was the trouble? A hundred things. His unfaithfulness; his egotism; his eternal play-acting; his gigantic pride; his lack of tenderness; his deafening exuberance; his selfishness" (p.67). This does not help alleviate the pain of remembrance, however. Like Titus, he finds that images return to haunt him and at moments override all other considerations: ". . . he had realized that the past can never be recaptured, even if he had wished it, and he turned his life away from her, as a man turns his back upon his own youth" (p.94). In spite of this, he mounts his llama and canters across the hills to Juno in his need to pour out all his dreams. It is precisely because they know "too much about each other" (p.95) that he has this freedom: ". . . he needed her again. There were stars to talk about, and the fishes of the sea. There were demons and there were the wisps of down that cling to the breasts of the seraphim. There were old clothes to ponder and terrible diseases. There were the flying missiles and the weird workings of the heart" (p.95). This is the love of the fecund world that the spirit of Nonsense encompasses, it is the spirit of Pye, of Prunesquallor, of Peake. But when Muzzlehatch reaches Juno, he finds that it is too late and he leaves with "a dull and sombre pain" (p.97). Betrayal of the dream of the past can exact a cruel revenge -- it betrays the dreamer.

Muzzlehatch's awareness of this perhaps explains the mixture of

defiance, condescension and mockery with which he speaks of Titus's need for flight:

'I have no feelings. As for you. Get on with life. Eat it up. Travel. Make journeys in your mind. Make journeys on your feet. To prison with you in a filthy garb! To glory with you in a golden car! Revel in loneliness. This is only a city. This is no place to halt.' (p.107)

Later, after rescuing Titus from the Under-River, he tells him: "The world is wide. Follow your instinct and get rid of us. That was why you left your so-called Gormenghast, wasn't it? Eh? To find out what lay beyond the skyline" (p.144) This goads Titus into a feverish defense of the Castle which reveals most strongly his sense of pain and loss, and the advice which Muzzlehatch then gives him points him, ironically, back to Eden, to the world of myth, to Gormenghast, and the guiding pillar of cloud is shaped like one of Gertrude's curled-up cats:

'That is your direction. . . . Make for it. Then on and beyond for a month's march, and you will be in comparative freedom. Freedom from the swarms of pilotless planes: freedom from bureaucracy: freedom from the police. And freedom of movement. It is largely unexplored. They are ill-equipped. No squadron for the water, sea, or sky. It is as it should be. A region where no one can remember who is in power. But there are forests like the Garden of Eden where you can lie on your belly and write bad verse. There will be nymphs for your ravishing, and flutes for your delectation. A land where youths lean backwards in their tracks, and piss the moon, as though to put it out.' (p.144,

The mixture of cynicism and idealism contained in this speech echoes the ambivalence of Titus's attitude towards his home, and also foreshadows Cheeta's travesty which has the unexpected effect of strengthening Titus's belief. Muzzlehatch's cynicism is directed at Titus rather than his "so-called Gormenghast" in the speech that follows. Here, Titus's apparently unwilling mentor hints at the foolishness of those who have not learned an appreciation of their past, who have learned "the art of making enemies" which is "indeed good for the soul" in that it enables distancing from the familiar in order to assess it more fully, but who have neglected "another language" that is "[s]tark: dry: unequivocal: and cryptic: a thing

of crusts and water" (p.145). This is the language of Gormenghast, a language "adamantine, obdurate, inviolable, stone upon stone" (p.145).

To complete a quotation used earlier from The Secular Scripture:

The secular scripture tells us that we are the creators; other scriptures tell us that we are actors in a drama of divine creation and redemption. Even Alice is troubled by the thought that her dream may not have been hers but the Red King's. Identity and self-recognition begin when we realize that this is not an either-or question, when the great twins of divine creation and human recreation have merged into one, and we can see that the same shape is upon both. 39

The Gormenghast that has always been there, that is "as it should be" and the Gormenghast that Titus has spoken for himself are equally necessary to him. The "alphabet of arch and aisle" must merge with the alphabet of cave and forest.

When man chooses to ignore the shape of divine creation, to reshape it in his own image, destruction and chaos are loosed upon the world. At first, Titus is awed by this "brave new world" with its gleaming buildings and silent needle-like "devices" (p.34) speeding through the air: "Had Titus come across a world of dragons he could hardly have been more amazed than by these fantasies of glass and metal. . ." (p.32). This sensation soon gives way to laughter, "high-pitched and uncontrolled" (pp.34-35) and frightened, but a release from wonderment as Titus realizes the ludicrously reductive purpose of this world of crystal buildings and flying splinters; for the "exquisite beast of the air" is also the "godlike child of a diseased brain" and it acts "like any other petty snooper, prying upon man and child, sucking information as a bat sucks blood; amoral; mindless, acting as its maker would act, its narrow-headed maker. . ." (p.34).

What follows reveals "narrow-headed" people whose image is the mindless but beautiful spying dart. Like Steerpikie peering through the keyhole into the world of the Groans, Titus peers through the skylight into the world of the sophisticates (and like Peake, the distanced observer of the "heads" of London -- there is a very dubious boundary between voyeurism and artistic observation). Framed by the skylight, a world strange to Titus but very familiar to us

becomes visible. André Dhôtel has pointed out that visibility is essential to this society. Secret worlds and private spaces are forbidden, so that both Titus and Muzzlehatch become objects of suspicion: ". . . Titus is as unacceptable as he is inconceivable in a world where nothing secret, consequently nothing human, subsists for the simple reason that everything must be visible. The very houses are made of transparent material, and at meetings only the most banal of subjects may be mentioned." ⁴⁰ (Where the vast warren of Gormenghast at least permitted the luxury of secret worlds, the only secret world in Titus Alone is the death factory).

The description of the socialites suggests a world of fragmented mutants. This is not the dynamic integration of man and beast that marks the "tiger-men," or Muzzlehatch, the stag-rider, or Titus, the antelope boy, the metamorphosis of mythic joy. It is the process of transmutation that takes place as the world decays, the metamorphosis that is agony, that is debasement and perversion, a merging of forms that leads to entropy and chaos. This is the dark side of those "Aunts and Uncles" who turn into birds, pigs and snakes: "They were all there. The giraffe-men and the hippopotamus-men. The serpent-ladies and the heron-ladies. . . . There were limbs and heads and bodies everywhere: and there were faces! There were the foreground faces; the middle-distance faces; and the faces far away. And in the irregular gaps between the faces were parts of faces, and halves and quarters at every tilt and angle" (p.38). Titus "marvelled at the spectacle" (p.39), we are told, but whatever bizarre visual appeal there may be in this cubist vision, the inane conversation that Titus overhears makes us fully aware of the effete sterility of these people. Through the description of the party Peake subjects twentieth century society to satirical laughter, as he does through Irma's party (and as Jane Austen does by collecting groups of people together at social rituals). As Gilbert Highet has suggested, "[s]atire sometimes looks at reality as a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, deserving nothing but a bitter laugh." ⁴¹ Thus, we find the poet whose poem was unsuccessful because "it was verse all the time." "Was it blank verse?" asks a sapphire-bedecked woman (p.40). The poet strikes a pose and declaims the first of the sixty-four stanzas. In spite of him, the "nonsense" becomes a comment

on the lack of imagination that pervades the conversation around him:

Lost in the venal void our dreams deflate
By easy stages through green atmosphere:
Imagination's bright balloon is late,
Like the blue whale, in coming up for air. (p.41)

In the rhythm of the crowd's movement, another group, a tall "grove of guests" appears beneath Titus. The "slender creature, thin as a switch, swathed in black" (p.43), Mrs. Grass, four times married and flirting with Mr. Kestrel, invites the "short, thick and sapless" Mr. Acreblade to talk to them: "We need your steady brain. We are so pitifully emotional. Such babies" (p.43). In contrast, her husband eulogizes: "Cold love's the loveliest of all. So clear, so crisp, so empty. In short, so civilized" (p.45). Kestrel, who clearly does not quite fit in, calls for life to be "various, incongruous, vile and electric" (p.44), but his shallowness becomes evident when he sees in the fickle and silly Mrs. Grass something "out of a legend" (p.45). This wasteland society is contrasted with the physical wasteland through which Acreblade tracks Titus, in a way calculated to cause a psychic breakdown in the boy. It is not the clear-cut method of stalk, capture and punish, but the nightmarish method of simply shadowing. The victim has the persistent awareness of being watched and followed, with no resolution, no climax. Titus's delirium with its allusions to strange and unseen worlds marks him out as a victim of the fancy-dress world in which he finds himself:

"I shadowed a suspect. A youth not known in these parts. He stumbled ahead of me in the sandstorm, a vague shape. Sometimes I lost him altogether. Sometimes I all but found myself beside him, and was forced to retreat a little way. Sometimes I heard his singing, mad, wild, inconsequential songs. Sometimes he shouted out as though he were delirious -- words that sounded like 'Fuchsia,' 'Flay' and other names. Sometimes he cried out 'Mother!' and once he fell on his knees and cried, 'Gormenghast, Gormenghast, come back to me again!'" (p.48)

For wandering through the desert and crying for his home, for having no papers, Acreblade must shadow Titus and, as he falls through the skylight, arrest him for being "a vagrant; an alien; an undesirable" (p.53).

In the face of this, Titus clings desperately to the "egg-shaped flint" (p.21), symbol of his birthplace, his cradle, his identity and his determination that the people of this new world should acknowledge in him Lord Titus Groan, 77th Earl of Gormenghast. During his imprisonment and trial, this identity is sorely tested and his longing for his home reaches a new pitch of intensity. Gazing through the barred window at sunset he sees a "transfigured" landscape: "So ethereal was the light that great cedars floated upon it and hilltops seemed to wander through the gold" (p.68). The image recalls Gormenghast floating on the mists of the morning and the waves of the flood, and the bird that flutters to the window-sill seems to be Gertrude's messenger to her lost child. Titus's very stance, framed by the window, is reminiscent of those two portraits of his mother and sister who seem so integrally a part of the Castle as they stand at their windows. It is not surprising that one of Titus's most painful moments of loneliness and remembrance should come upon him now:

Then out of the golden atmosphere: out of the stones of the cell: out of the cedars: out of a flutter of the magpie's wing, came a long waft of memory so that images swam up before his eyes and he saw, more vividly than the sunset or the forested hills, the long coruscated outline of Gormenghast and the stones of his home where the lizards lazed, and there, blotting out all else, his mother as he had last seen her at the door of the shanty, the great dripping castle drawn up like a backcloth behind her. (p.68)

The static beauty of the image now seems inexpressibly precious to Titus, and the prison in which he finds himself is very different from the Lichen Fort where Fuchsia could pass him barley sugar, and Prunesquallor and Bellgrove could turn the room into "a world apart" (GG,p.150), where sparkling marbles could skim across the floor. Now the only ones to enter the prison room are Old Crime and the vicious warder, who clouts Titus across the head. Old Crime, with his head like that "of a batter'd god" (p.71) and his slimy sycophancy, travesties the "ravaged god" (p.26) that is Muzzlehatch. He also tries to tempt Titus with a philosophy that runs counter to everything Muzzlehatch believes in. For Old Crime, "all is as it should be" (p.72) whereas for Muzzlehatch that statement can only be made about the Garden of Eden that lies beyond the Wasteland. For Old Crime, the

prison is "a world within a world" (p.72), a "Honeycomb" (p.72), but cut off from the natural world, a society of the spineless who care for nothing more than indulgence in sentimentality and who look forward to nothing more than the chance to "grow old together" (p.72): "You've come to the right place," he tells Titus, "Away from the filthy thing called Life. Join us, dear boy. You would be an asset. My friends are unique. Grow old with us" (p.73).

This temptation to retreat completely from all the problems posed by the outside world and solve the question of identity by simply losing any identity at all is countered by the first trial. What has been implicit in the attitude of Acreblade and the heron-ladies, becomes explicit in the court scene: Titus cannot be tolerated by this society for which appearance is reality. It is "an age of surfaces."⁴² The judge depends entirely on his wig for his appearance of authority: "Once the wig was gone then he was gone with it. He became a little man among little men" (p.81). It is also interesting to note that the only time darkness and shadows are welcomed is when the light threatens to make an equation between appearance and reality, to remove the mystery of the judge's wig and reveal him as a little man. The judge is, naturally, nonplussed by Titus: ". . . it is not your vagrancy that troubles me. That is straightforward, though culpable. It is that you are rootless and obtuse. It seems you have some knowledge hidden from us. Your ways are curious, your terms are meaningless. I will ask you once again. What is this Gormenghast? What does it mean?" (p.77) That is the question that Titus tries to answer throughout the book. His answer here is a thought-provoking precursor to the final answer that will dawn on him at the end: "You might just as well ask me what is this hand of mine? What does it mean? . . . Or what is this leg?" (p.77). This is very similar to the description of the way in which Titus's father identified with the Castle (TG,p.62). The difference lies in the fact that by articulating the identification Titus makes it a conscious one, achieved by having distanced himself from the Castle. Heart and head both contribute towards the search for identity. Sepulchrave's unconscious identification, on the contrary, has to be articulated by his author.

Titus goes on to try and explain his world to the court, and so explain himself, but finds himself confronting the same problem we are presented with at the beginning of the book: how is Gormenghast

the same and yet different from the world he is in now?:

Were they coeval; were they simultaneous? These worlds; these realms -- could they both be true? Were there no bridges? Was there no common land? Did the same sun shine upon them? Had they the constellations of the night in common? (pp.32-33)

This is also the dilemma of the artist -- what do the world of the imagination and the world "out there" have in common? How are the boundaries to be defined? For Titus, the discovery that there are indeed boundaries to Gormenghast is a painful one. He marvels at the self-sufficiency of the cities, just as he had at the Thing. He wonders at the air of difference that surrounds them, and yet there are puzzling similarities:

'What can I tell you? It spreads in all directions. There is no end to it. Yet it seems to me now to have boundaries. It has the sunlight and the moonlight on its walls just like this country. There are rats and moths -- and herons. It has bells that chime. It has forests and it has lakes and it is full of people.' (p.85)

The attempt to understand the nature of Gormenghast in the trial scene seems to take place at three levels. There is the dramatic level, where we see the members of the court trying to give Titus a chance to justify himself. The only way they seem able to respond to his situation is to reduce it to comforting expressions like "delusions of grandeur" and to turn Titus into an interesting case study for Dr. Filby (p.84). A despiritualized society can then secure its place on its pedestal by assuring itself that the language of reason has triumphed. It is this isolation of the "mad" that Michel Foucault has attacked and the following comments which he makes are pertinent to the kind of society Peake depicts here:

In the serene world of mental illness, modern man no longer communicates with the madman: on one hand, the man of reason delegates the physician to madness, thereby authorizing a relation only through the abstract universality of disease; on the other, the man of madness communicates with society only by the intermediary of an equally abstract reason which is order, physical and moral constraint, the anonymous pressure of the group, the requirements of conformity. As for a common language, there is no such thing;

or rather, there is no such thing any longer; the constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue, posits the separation as already effected, and thrusts into oblivion all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason about madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence. 43

The society in which Titus finds himself refuses to speak his "mad, wild, inconsequential" language (p.48), and, failing to understand "the truth in his head" (p.86), sees that truth simply as an unforgivable deviation from its rationalist and materialist norms. It thus arrogates to itself the right to call him "dotty" (p.84). The colloquialism is itself a comfortingly familiarizing way of dealing with the mystery that surrounds Titus.

At the personal level, Titus tries to reconcile "the truth in his head" with an unsympathetic world. He becomes aware that the synthesis achieved just before his epic struggle with Steerpikie was only sufficient for that struggle within the context of a world he knew. A different synthesis is needed, and one more difficult to achieve, between everything that Gormenghast represents for him -- passion and imagination -- and everything that the new world represents -- "cold love" (p.45) and science. He has to bridge two apparently diametrically opposed worlds. Indeed, the judge tells him that his title "belongs to another age" (p.86).

At the aesthetic level, Peake himself is involved most explicitly in an attempt to understand what he has created, and how his imaginative world and the real world inform each other. For Peter McKenzie, this self-questioning is the crux of Peake's work:

. . . in Peake's work the overt, narrative aspects and the implicit significance of the work's very existing reinforce and complement one another. For what is said of Titus, and of other characters, is also what is true of Peake in his own quest: a quest for the meaning of his creating of Gormenghast. This is the core and the dynamic of the work: this reflexive attitude to what it is he is doing; and in this Peake resembles so many of his contemporaries, French, Irish, American novelists who make their own practice a part of their theme. Only, his peculiarly unprogrammatic approach tends to conceal these important affinities, and with it his modernity. 44

It has already become clear that the descriptions of Fuchsia's attic, of Steerpike's clown act and his escape over the roofs of the Castle, of Gertrude and Sepulchra's private worlds, of Titus's discovery of the beauty of balconies, marbles and forests, of his tenth birthday celebrations and his love for the Thing all contribute to the author's meditation on the meaning of Gormenghast and on his role as artist. In Titus Alone, this meditation is simply more overt. We have Muzzlehatch's pronouncements on the value of words and the need for experience to complement those words, and we have Titus constantly trying to verbalize his impressions of the world that has now become "the truth in his head," and the "kingdom in his head" for both author and hero.

Titus's love for Juno comes as an interlude in this process of self-questioning, but as he sinks himself in the experience, he also re-enacts the pattern of experience that has led to his self-questioning -- the pattern of merging with the "mother" only to retreat and analyze one's relationship to the "mother," be it Gertrude, Gormenghast, or Juno. It is as "the roof-swarmer, the skylight-burster. . . the ragged boy from nowhere" (p.58) that Juno responds to Titus. It is his aura of mystery that attracts her, and sets her apart from a society which Peake has shown to be without genuine passion, brilliant with masks and mirrors, and as brittle, a bric-a-brac world of women who "come and go / Talking of Michelangelo"⁴⁵

The relationship between Juno and Titus is described in terms that clearly recall Gormenghast:

At first what was it but an apprehension sweet as far birdsong -- a tremulous thing -- an awareness that fate had thrown them together; a world had been brought into being -- had been discovered? A world, a universe over whose boundaries and into whose forests they had not dared to venture. (p.88)

This love, with its echoes of Titus's discovery of the forests on Gormenghast Mountain, suggests that he has discovered a mature sexual relationship, prefigured in that earlier experience. We are also told that "[t]hey would lean on the window-sill of Juno's beautiful room and gaze for hours on end at the far hills. . . ." (p.88). The image of the window-sill, associated with Gertrude, suggests that

Juno, goddess of love and fertility (and who is twice Titus's age, as she never fails to forget) is a substitute for mother and Castle. Juno's monologue, as she broods on her feelings for Titus, is couched in terms that look back to Gertrude's last words, if in a somewhat altered, even inverted, form:

'He needs me,' she would mutter in a kind of golden growl. 'It is for me to give him joy -- to give him direction -- to give him love. Let the world say what it likes -- he is my mission. I will be always at his side. He may not know it, but I will be there. In body or in spirit always, near him when he most needs me. My child from Gormenghast. My Titus Groan.' (p.90)

There is a hint here that Titus's final synthesis will come about through a reconciliation of the two perspectives provided by Gertrude and Juno -- in returning to Gormenghast, Gormenghast returns to him, in mutual fulfilment. That this fulfilment will not, however, take place at a simple physical level is also suggested by Titus's departure from Juno's pink house. There is something in him that Juno cannot fathom, something that physical nearness cannot obliterate. He is like a "ghost never to be held at the breast. Something that will always melt away" (p.89).

Titus fears being "caught in the generous folds of her love" (p.91), for it is a love that, like the Castle, cuts him off from the world outside. Juno leads him to a room that has "the remoteness of a ship at sea -- a removal from normal life about it" (p.93) and the water image, which once more suggests the deluge of the unconscious, reappears later when Juno finds him asleep, dreaming of a creature "falling at length into a lake of pale rainwater":

And as it sank, fathom by darkening fathom, a great host of heads, foreign yet familiar, arose from the deep and bobbed upon the water -- and a hundred strange yet reminiscent voices began to call across the waves until from horizon to horizon he was filled with a great turbulence of sight and sound. (p.98)

When he wakes to the world "outside himself" (p.98), he sees Juno, who, in her striped dress, looks like a "'severed woman'" (p.98). As he has severed himself from the "hundred strange yet reminiscent voices" of his dream, severing the Castle's tradition in the process,

so now he has to cut his ties with Juno whatever the pain that might cause her. At the moment of his waking, Juno realizes that Titus is irremediably separate from her: "He was an island surrounded by deep water. There was no isthmus leading to her bounty; no causeway to her continent of love" (pp. 98-99). This image mirrors almost exactly the penultimate scene in Gormenghast, where Titus stands on the Mountain like "an island surrounded by deep water" and sees the "continent of love" that is the Castle. It precedes his desertion just as the present scene precedes his leaving Juno, for he has to follow the advice that Muzzlehatch gives him later and "cut adrift" (p.144). But cutting loose from Juno means confronting himself in frightening isolation once more: "It was a feeling that in leaving her he had once again to face the problem of his own identity. He was a part of something bigger than himself. He was a chip of stone, but where was the mountain from which it had broken away? He was the leaf but where was the tree?" (p.102). Until Titus has come to terms with that which is "bigger than himself," he cannot give freely of himself to other people. In this sense, flight from Gormenghast and flight from women have similar implications, the need to return and the need to realize the value of love that reaches out beyond the self and makes the world. Love for Juno, for someone outside himself, depends on coming to terms with his primal love for his mother and the Castle of which she is the human embodiment, the "mater natura and mater spiritualis, of the totality of life of which we are a small and helpless part," to use Jung's expression.⁴⁶ Titus must learn that commitment to another person or another world need not mean the loss of the self, but a joyful recognition of the unity and harmony of all things, containing, in the great paradox, the variety of all things. He has to learn to reconcile "otherness" with "sameness" at the level of personal relationships and at the level of inner and outer worlds, just as Peake attempts to do in his three novels. At present, Titus carries "over his shoulders a private world like a cloak" (p.89). The image of the cloak must be exchanged for something less suggestive of the need to hide and protect, something that suggests, rather, courageous exposure of that world so that it may become a force for purposive encounter and transformation.

The first half of Titus Alone introduces us to those who will

love and defend Titus and to those who are threatened by him and reject him. Their attitudes to Titus are also their attitudes to the mysterious, the passionate, the imaginative. Juno and Muzzlehatch are attracted to these qualities, while the larger society tries to abolish them. The expression of this attempt to abolish all that is irrational is the Under-River, to which Titus flees after destroying the technological masterpiece -- the globe that spies on him. Significantly, he shatters it with the flint from Gormenghast, but this also means the sacrifice of the last tactile evidence of the Castle. Like the flying splinter, the globe is delicate and beautiful and, like the splinter, its beauty has been perverted and debased to perform something despicable (Peake has already demonstrated, in the form of Steerpike, his loathing for the callous intrusion into the private world). Muzzlehatch makes it clear that Titus's destruction of this "toy" (p.106) is as stunning an act of sabotage as the Thing's stealing of the carving. He has struck at the heart of the ethic of visibility, and at the heart of the scientific world, which seeks to create but only succeeds in demolishing everything that makes life worth living:

'You have broken something quite hideously efficient. You have blasphemed against the spirit of the age. You have shattered the very spear-head of advancement. . . . These globes have origins. Somewhere or other there's a backroom boy, his soul working in the primordial dark of a diseased yet sixty horse-power brain.' (p.106)

Muzzlehatch gives Titus a talisman to replace the flint and to give him access to the Under-River, which is the underside of the cold and rational world above. The infinite variety of human nature with its dreams and fears is contrasted with the shifting and fragmented identities of the heron-ladies in the upperworld, part of a tarnished "collective Soul" (p.53), which is deaf to the tintinnabulum. The Under-River is also, of course, the image of the subversive nature of fantasy -- "a dark circus" (p.132) that the rational world would prefer to forget.

Peake has clearly drawn on his experiences of post-war Germany for his descriptions in the second half of Titus Alone, but these descriptions also have much in common with apocalyptic dystopias that

picture the entire post-war world as a wasteland of the weary and the dispossessed.⁴⁷ Although Peake expressed his horror of the war and its effects in his poetry and drawings, the direct presentation of his vision of it in the novels only takes place about a decade after the end of the war when he is back in London writing a book concerned specifically with the contemporary era. The war then becomes an archetypal image for the twentieth century which Titus is in the process of discovering.

Describing post-war Germany to Maeve, Peake wrote how "along the road were all types of Germans pushing hand-carts or riding ox-drawn carts or pushing prams, each with the remains of their furniture." He also saw "a boy whose face looked about sixteen, but whose hair was grey, who was hobbling down the steps of a town-hall with a crutch and only one leg."⁴⁸ He writes, too, of the "unutterable desolation" and "the broken streets of every small town."⁴⁹ This is all translated into "[a] world of sound and silence stitched together" (p.111): "Long fleets of tables were like rafts with legs, or like a market, for there were figures seated at these tables with crates and sacks before them or at their sides or heaped together upon the damp ground. . . a sodden and pathetic salvage, telling of other days in other lands" (p.110). The gloom of the scene is broken by "shreds of light" (p.110) and Peake develops a sustained chiaroscuro passage which emphasises the grotesqueness of this world, a grotesqueness to be transfigured in the ensuing chapters.⁵⁰

It was so vast a district that there were of necessity deep swaths of darkness hanging beyond reach of brand or lantern, dire volumes at whose centres the air was thick and dark, and smelt of desolation. The candles guttered even at the verge of these deadly pockets, guttered and failed as though from a failure of the candle's nerve.
(p.111)

When a lantern is lit, it sheds a light that is "the colour of a bruise. . . . casting the kind of glow that suggests crime," and transforming "the kindest smile" into something "ghastly" (p.113). It is the world of Rembrandt and Goya, a flickering nightmare. Peter Conrad has suggested that chiaroscuro is "romantic light" and is related to "Gothic light" and "the gloomy suspended fearful spirituality of Dickens's fog."⁵¹ It is a light which appears in

"the nervous terrors of Goya, whose grotesquerie is the product of the sleep of reason, and whose shadows stir with monstrous life. . . ."52 Just so, the Under-River is the monstrous world produced by the sleep of reason of the upper world:

And so the halls and tunnels of the cold sub-river life where it throbbed beneath the angry water were, to the populace on the opposing banks, in the nature of a bad dream, both too bizarre to be taken seriously, yet horrid enough to speculate upon, only to recoil, only to speculate again, and recoil again, and tear the clinging cobwebs from the brain. (p.112)

This is the Under-River seen from the perspective of the city. As we descend into that world, however, the monsters become painfully human. There is Mr. Crabcalf, the failed poet, surrounded by his remaindered epic: "His head, like Jacob's on the famous stone, rested against the volumes of lost breath. The ladder from his miserable bed reached up to heaven. But there were no angels" (p.114). At the base of the ladder, Crabcalf has settled in the rag-and-bone shop, his epic having failed to sustain him in a world that has denied the age of the epic and, instead of "the totality of life"⁵³ satisfies itself with glittering surfaces in a society of atomized puppets. With Carrow and Slingshott, he establishes an alternative society with its own rituals and its own sorrows. Carrow, who appears at first to be merely a dry caricature of a man, breaks down as he remembers home: "Home is a room dappled with firelight: there are pictures and books. And when the rain sighs, and the acorns fall, there are patterns of leaves against the drawn curtains. Home is where I was safe. Home is what I fled from" (p.116). The poignant description of Carrow's experience, impressionistic though it is, reveals the Under-River as a place where Titus will see the reflection of his own suffering.

There is also a latent energy and passion in this world, captured in the image of the lean hounds who speed through the caverns: "Their heads were held high as though to remind the world of a proud lineage, and their teeth were bared as a reminder of something less noble" (p.119). The presence of these "hot-breath'd lopers" (p.119) in a world of dereliction parallels the presence of Muzzlehatch and his extraordinary zoo in the heart of the "shimmering slums" (p.12),

suggesting in both cases that the only places able to contain this kind of primitive vitality are places beyond the pale, in the social and psychological underworlds. Peake's reversal of Dickens's moral stance is also seen here. Where Dickens, according to Rosemary Jackson, "[alienates] the reader from a 'demonic' world which lies outside bourgeois reality" and yet "[locates] all energy and vitality within that under-world," Peake makes us sympathise wholly with the under-world, in which we find "all energy and vitality."⁵⁴ He individualizes the eccentrics of this world by giving us privileged glimpses into their dream worlds or by suggesting past lives that have led them to the Under-River. No such privileged moments are given us concerning the society of the upper world, where there is nothing to look for but what is obvious.

In the Under-River we find the frail old couple, Jonah and his aged "squirrel" (p.121), who, Penelope-like, spends her life disentangling wool; we find the merry Crack-Bell and the frustrated Mrs. Zed who, with her sexless but "brilliant, articulate, white-eyelashed" husband who can do nothing but wander among abstractions (p.123), has produced a child, a baby, the only one we meet in the book: "In the eyes of the ragged infant there seems to be an innocence quite moving to behold. A final innocence that has survived in spite of a world of evil" (p.122). In spite, too, of its vacuous parents. The child and the dogs, surviving, resilient, suggest why it is possible for Peake to say that the one thing that holds all these people together is hope: "Hope like a wavering marsh-light: hope like a pale sun: hope like a floating leaf" (p.112). Thus, when the dogs howl or the baby turns on his "tiny waterworks" like an "arc of gold" (p.122), they bring a kind of simple glory into the shadows that the sunlit world will never know.

At the other extreme is the beautiful Black Rose:

She had been through too much, and all resilience had gone. She stood there, upright but broken. Three revolutions had rocked over her. She had heard the screaming. Sometimes she did not know whether it was herself or someone else who screamed. The cry of children who have lost their mother. (p.125)

The cry for the mother seems to become the cry of the whole world for the love and safety of the nest. In Black Rose's eyes is "the

ghost of unbearable disillusion" (p.128). She has lost both love and, it would seem, hope, yet she has enough spirit left to defy Veil, "the spider-man" (p.130). When he sees Veil, Titus feels as if he is in the presence of death itself: "All he knew was that as he stared at the spider-man, he, Titus, began to age. A cloud had passed over his heart. He was not so much in the thick of an adventure as alone with something that smelt of death" (p.130). It is love for his home which gives Titus the strength to fight this evil, this death and Gormenghast becomes, quite specifically, a force for life, so that the fight that ensues becomes a re-enactment of the struggle in the ivy between Titus and Steerpike: "A primordial love for his birthplace, a love which survived and grew, for all that he had left his home, for all that he was a traitor, burned in him with a ferocity that he could not understand" (p.130). As Titus once avenged Fuchsia, so now he avenges another dark-haired, disillusioned girl; as he defended all the good in Gormenghast, so now he seems to do the same for the Under-River, in so many ways an image of his home; as he moved to the centre of the drama then, so he moves to the centre of the ring now. There is one important difference, however, and that is that the Under-River is not Gormenghast and the strength which Titus draws from his home is not yet powerful enough for him to conquer Veil. He has, as yet, neither committed himself fully enough to the Castle nor assimilated his diverse experiences beyond its margins, although his own experience of suffering and loss enables him to see beyond the apparently unabated evil of Veil, and there is a moment of recognition:

For an instant there rushed through Titus's mind an understanding. For a moment he lost his hatred. He abhorred nothing. The man had been born with his bones and his bowels. He could not help them. He had been born with a skull so shaped that only evil could inhabit it. (p.136)

Unlike Titus, Muzzlehatch has no fear of the smell of death for he is deeply aware that it hovers over everything in life. Furthermore, his love for life is richer and more mature, and his loyalty to and faith in his animals gives him the strength to kill Veil, the man who so mercilessly crushes the life out of the rat (p.134). All Titus can do is perform the last rite and cover the dead animal with a cloth.

Titus's response to the Black Rose is similarly ineffectual, emphasising his immaturity and suggesting that the inability to commit himself to her is also partly responsible for his inability to avenge her. His momentary understanding of Veil gives way to a variation on Veil's lack of compassion: "I can't sustain her. I can't comfort her. I can't love her. Her suffering is far too clear to see. There is no veil across it: no mystery: no romance. Nothing but a factual pain, like the pain of a nagging tooth" (p.140). If there is a pun intended here, it might suggest that, for Titus, the presence of Veil did in fact give the confrontation the quality of adventure, did shed some sort of glamour over it. The boy could see himself as the gallant knight rescuing the damsel in distress. Having failed, however, to be a hero, he fails to be a generous human being, and in the modern age in which he finds himself, generosity of spirit is ultimately the true heroism.

It is important, though, that Titus has become aware of the selfishness that underlies his desire for isolation, that underlies his inability fully to understand his relationship to Gormenghast. Having run away from Juno's love, he now runs away from Muzzlehatch's pain, a pain which he describes in terms that capture the grandeur and the agony of Titus's Castle home:

'I want to get away from you,' he said. 'From you and everyone. I want to start again, when but for you, I would be dead! Is this vile of me? I cannot help it. You are too vast and craggy. Your features are the mountains of the moon. Lions and tigers lie bleeding in your brain. Revenge is in your belly. You are too vast and remote.'
(p.143)

One recalls the roofscape "as barren as the moon" (TG,p.135) and the "tortured trees" that "burned and dripped" (TG,p.196). The sympathy between landscape and Castle is paralleled by the scene where Muzzlehatch watches the sunset and answers the challenge of the clouds:

A coloured circus caught in a whirl of air had disintegrated and in its place a thousand animals of cloud streamed through the west. . . . Beasts of the earth and air, lifting their heads to cry. . . to howl. . . to scream, but they had no voices, and their jaws remained apart, gulping the fast air.
(p.156)

Muzzlehatch's decision to avenge his animals becomes specifically identified with the need to avenge Gormenghast. Like Titus, he has become "lord of nothing" and his life has been "snapped in half" (p.157). Like Titus, he loses everything, and the word repeated so often at the beginning of the book becomes a refrain linking the two characters: "Ape gone. Car gone. All gone?" (p.158). So Muzzlehatch sets out "to find the lost realm of Gormenghast" (p.158), and the way to vengeance and the discovery of the realm lies through "a region. . . where the scientists worked, like drones, to the glory of science and in praise of death" (p.159).

It is in this region that Muzzlehatch and Titus are put to the final test, and orchestrating the test is the diabolical essence of the new world, whose very name travesties the "[s]ensuous and terrible" animals of Muzzlehatch's zoo: Cheeta, the scientist's daughter. Like Rappacini's daughter in the story by Hawthorne, she is wonderfully beautiful, but filled with poison. This discrepancy between the mask and the personality also links Cheeta with the flying splinter and the globe which Titus destroys, and becomes a central image for a world seduced by the charm of appearance, especially the smooth beauty, the "slippery surface" on which the eye can find "no resting place" (p.31), and of which the people are images -- smooth, contained, frigid, antithetical to all that is represented by the grotesques of the Under-River.

Cheetah's beauty is almost the inverse of Steerpike's appearance. The latter is described as having something malformed about him (TG,p,127), but Cheeta's body is exquisite. Nevertheless, there is also something disturbing about "the bizarre diversity of her features" (p.160). Like Steerpike, she has a brilliant brain, she is small and agile, clinically and lethally efficient and possessed of an extraordinarily strong will. Like Steerpike, too, she represses her passions beneath her sophistication and her cold, controlling brain, but this does not destroy them; it simply warps them and leaves her ultimately helpless to deal with what is beyond her rational understanding. As she sits before her mirror, there is a prophetic breakdown in control. As she broods on her inability to bring Titus completely within the aura of her influence, as she sits in her "austere and loveless room" (p.181), as she feels "[b]eneath the rigidity of her small, slender, military spine. . . a writhing

serpent" (p.183), a sound is heard:

Had it not been that there was no one else in the room one would not have guessed the sound to come from such pretty lips as Cheeta's. But now the sound grew louder and louder until she beat upon her granite dressing-table with her minute fists and called out, 'Beast, beast, beast! Go back to your filthy den. Go back to your Gormenghast!' and rising to her feet she swept the granite table with her arm so that everything that had been set out so beautifully was sent hurtling through the air to smash itself and waste itself upon the white camel skins of the carpet and the dusky red of the tapestries. (pp.183-184)

The sense of an upsurge of violence usually restrained recalls the irrepressible acrobatics of Steerpike when alone in his room (TG,p.482). The unconscious and the irrational rise like a "sea monster" from "the depths of the ocean; scaled and repulsive," and the mask of sophistication which he paints on her face is destroyed along with the make-up, sweeping away "all that was blurred in her mind and passion" (p.184).

How different is this response from that of Juno, with her voluptuous and honest generosity, her willingness to believe in Titus and Gormenghast without trying to submit them to any rationalization. Like Steerpike, Cheeta does not respond to the "language made almost foreign by the number of places and of people; words she had never heard of, with one out-topping all. . . Gormenghast" (p.162), with joy and wonder at the strangeness of it all, but with a desire to manipulate and subdue, hence the cold and calculating flick of her tongue as she listens to Titus: "Cheeta, for the first time in her life, felt in the presence of blood so much bluer than her own. She ran her little tongue along her lips" (p.162).

Titus's relationship with Cheeta is a violent contrast to the one he shares with Juno. Cheeta's "marvellous face" and "warped brain" (pp.172-173) have resulted in something hardly human. Her virginity is not a virtue, but an indication of her inability to integrate mind, heart and body as a total human being. She is "Cheeta, the virgin, slick as a needle to the outward eye, foul in the inward" (p.199). We remember that Steerpike's lips were "thin as a prude's" (GG,p.496). Cheeta is also referred to as "a doll" (p.169) and, like the automaton in Hoffman's The Sandman who makes a mockery of

the hero's love, she is as deceptive, as desirable, with a "face lit up as though with an inner light" (p.169). Her insubstantiality in comparison with the warm, rich Juno is seen too in her voice "as light and as listless as thistledown" (p.165), where Juno's was a "golden growl" (p.90). The scene marking Titus's rejection of Cheeta is also a stark contrast to the measured dignity of Juno and Titus's separation. The smell of the "sweet decay" of the death factory (p.167) taints the scene, which becomes even less appealing as Cheeta bids Titus chase her: "There was something incurably obvious about it all. Something puerile. They were riding on the wings of a cliché. Man pursues woman at dawn! Man has got to consummate his lust!" (p.170). This is clearly opposed to the first time Juno and Titus make love, a scene pervaded by merriment and joyous laughter as the boy trips and sprawls at her feet: "It was the death-knell of false sentiment and of any cliché, or recognized behaviour" (p.93).

With Cheeta, Titus cuts through false sentiment with a brutal honesty which infuriates her, but indicates a remarkable increase in self-sufficiency on Titus's part. It is as if the tables have been turned on this society which had once awed Titus with its complacent ignorance of Gormenghast. The "resentment that this alien realm should be able to exist in a world that appeared to have no reference to his home" (p.32) gives way to laughter at the "alien realm." Titus tells Cheeta:

'I have to form a barrier against you. A barrier of foolery. I cannot, I must not take it seriously, this land of yours, this land of factories, this you. I have been here long enough to know it is not for me. You are no help with your peculiar wealth and beauty. It leads nowhere. It keeps me like a dancing bear on the end of a rope. (p.171)

Cheeta, wooing, like Steerpike, by the book, is at a loss to handle this and she is "humble by him" so that all she can do is break out in invective: "You're cheap. You're shoddy. You're weak. You're probably mad. You and your Gormenghast! You make me sick" (p.173). Her rejection of Titus and his home makes a mockery of her earlier words (which are an ironic echo of Juno's, said in soliloquy): "You are my mystery" (p.172). It is precisely this uncontrollable mystery that angers Cheeta (just as her lack of imaginative depth

cannot see the mystery of sex, only the mechanics of it). Juno and Cheeta seem to represent for Titus the earth mother and the witch of traditional romance. Like the witch, Cheeta is associated with the "unspeakable rites" practised in her father's factory, a black magic arising out of the new age.⁵⁵ Juno's magic, on the contrary, is natural and restorative and associated with the world that Titus feels to be more and more precious: "Behind him, whenever he stood, or slept, were the legions of Gormenghast. . . tier upon cloudy tier, with the owls calling through the rain, and the ringing of the rust-red bells" (p.189).

As Titus yearns more and more for his home, so his allegiance to Muzzlehatch grows stronger, and he sends the Three, who have found a new lease on life, to find the tormented god. Again the identification of Titus's quest with Muzzlehatch's is made, as the latter comes "[s]hambling his way from the west": "Just as Titus ached for Gormenghast, ached to embrace its crumbling walls, so Muzzlehatch had set himself the task of discovering the centre of destruction" (p.198). And as Titus presses his head against a tree and calls in anguish for "the kingdom in [his] head" (p.195), as Muzzlehatch moves towards "the ghastly hive of horror" (p.199), where faces that are all the same stare out of windows, where voices can be heard pleading for life at the press of a button,⁵⁶ so Juno's love for Titus draws her back. She dreams of him "staggering with a castle on his back": "Tall towers were intertwined with locks of dark red hair. He cried out as he stumbled. . . 'Forgive me! Forgive me!' Behind him floated eyes. Nothing but eyes! Swarms of them. They sang as they floated through the air at his side, their pupils expanding or contracting according to the notes they were singing. It was horrible" (p.212). This grotesque vision has a positive outcome, however, for it causes Juno to re-evaluate her past, just as Titus is in the process of doing: "I need my past again. Without it I am nothing. I bob like a cork on deep water" (p.212).

Thus, the lines of battle are drawn up in preparation for the climactic sequence, a party and a trial that must draw together the strands of Cheeta's plot, of Titus's experience, of Peake's creation.

Cheetah has absorbed all the details of Gormenghast released by Titus's fevered brain. He tells her earlier, "Great God, you must have plundered my subconscious" (p.171), and there is the sense that

a terrible violation has taken place, similar to Steerpike's violation of Fuchsia's world, a psychic rather than a physical rape, in keeping with the vicious cerebral nature of the two villains. With her knowledge, unfairly gained, the young witch transforms the sinister Black House into an approximation of Titus's immemorial and shadowy home, and so violates the sanctuary of the animals who sit silent and bewildered by the change that has taken place. Animals and Muzzlehatch, Gormenghast and Titus -- the link is made once more and the common enemy is the scientist and his daughter ("there was something -- an emanation that linked father and daughter" p.185). The wild grace of the cats and their excited exploration of the house are sharply contrasted with the appearance of "the glittering beauties and the glittering horrors, arrayed like humming birds" (p.217), with their fear, their sophistication, their vapid egotism:

'It is primal, darling. Primal.'
 Another voice broke in. . . .
 'It is a place for frogs.'
 'Yes, yes, but we're ahead.'
 'Ahead of what?'
 'The avant-garde. Look at us. If we are not the soul
 of chic, who is?' (p.218)

By the end of the evening these delicate creatures will have become a bedraggled, angry mob. Counterpointing this modern society of exquisites is a "strider," "[b]arbaric to the eye, his silhouette more like something made of ropes and bones," Muzzlehatch (p.219). By this time he has had his baptism of fire, he has been to hell and back, the avenger of life who penetrates the factory of death to destroy it. Now he seeks out the satanic master to destroy him. There is a wildness in Muzzlehatch now and, like Titus, he "[drifts] away into an almost private language" (p.221). Again the image of a rat becomes a link between Titus and Muzzlehatch, this time as it floats away on a balloon "into the wilds of the mind," "helpless in its global sovereignty" (p.222). This is their paradox too.

The cinematic cross-cutting (the image of the rat is pure Eisensteinian montage) has the same effect that it does in a film: it quickens the pace and emphasises the various elements that are to draw together in the climax. The tone of the macabre scene to follow is set by the image of the "fleur du mal":

Under a light to strangle infants by, the great and horrible flower opened its bulbous petals one by one: a flower whose roots drew sustenance from the grey slime of the pit, and whose vile scent obscured the delicacy of the juniper. This flower was evil, and its bloom satanic, and though it was invisible its manifestations were on every side. (p.225)

John Batchelor has complained about the "imbalance of diction" making passages like this "farcical and bizarre by turns."⁵⁷ The crudity of the passage does seem, however, to suit the crudity of Cheeta's "black mass," and the, albeit demonic, puerility that can demand such degradation of another human being. It also prefigures the ludicrous collapse of the scene.

What follows is Cheeta's attempt to re-create the beautiful dream of Titus's tenth birthday as horrific nightmare, by means of all the technical resources at her disposal. Titus arrives at the Black House and the play commences. Cheeta's friends echo her every word, creating the setting for madness with the recollection of echoing corridors. The atmosphere becomes more menacing and the "banqueteers" huddle together (p.224). With histrionic flair, Cheeta whips off Titus's scarf to the accompaniment of a flurry of sensations -- colour, sound, light, smell. As with the tenth birthday masque, the borderline between dream and reality becomes difficult to establish and Cheeta capitalizes on this: the obvious theatricality of the coloured lights makes the natural moonlight appear to illuminate a real scene: ". . . there was a quality about this lunar scene which was more terrible than ever. They were no longer figures in a play. There was no longer any artifice. The stage had vanished. They were no longer actors in a drama of strange light. They were themselves" (p.227).

It is Cheeta's intention to make Titus doubt his existence by doubting his identity, so that he will believe himself as totally devoid of being as Muzzlehatch's animals, every hair annihilated by the death ray. Helpless to counter her attack actively, Titus does so by laughter, a laughter that refutes the "destructive humour" of the hyena and denies the power that Cheeta is exerting, a power that is a warped expression of her repressed sexuality. Like the Lamb in Boy in Darkness, she loses herself "in a deadly orgy of anticipation" and all she can do is "clench her tiny hands together

at her breast" (pp228-229). Her grotesque facial contortion is both "ludicrous" and "terrifying" (p.229), but Titus's regenerative laughter responds to the former "in favour of all that can become uncontrolled" (p.229):

Such a sensation can become too powerful for the human body. It is as easy to control as a sliding avalanche. It takes a sacrosanct convention and snaps it in half as though it were a stick. It lifts up some holy relic and throws it at the sun. It is laughter. Laughter when it stamps its feet; when it sets the bells jangling in the next town. Laughter with the pips of Eden in it. (p.229)

This is the carnivalesque laughter that destroys in order to restore, that has the joy of the innocent world in it, unlike the frozen grimace of Cheeta's mockery that seeks only to humiliate, degrade and annihilate. Cheeta, however, is still very much in control at this moment, flexible to the occasion and able to turn Titus's laughter against him, incorporating it as part of the illusion she is building up. As the helmeted figures grip Titus's arms, Cheeta's moment of climax arrives and the monstrous travesties start appearing "from the forgotten room" (p.233):

Were there a 'Gormenghast', then surely this mockery of his mother must humble and torture him, reminding him of his Abdication, and of all the ritual he so loved and loathed. If, on the other hand there were no such place, and the whole thing a concoction of his mind, then, mortified by this exposure of his secret love, the boy would surely break. (p.233)

This two-pronged attack, manipulating Titus's guilt on the one hand and ridiculing the imagination on the other also implies Peake's self-exposure to the taunts of the "rag-and-bone shop" (p.255). Like Titus, he has ridden out of Gormenghast in a brave attempt to face the twentieth century and like Titus the validity of his imaginative world is being cruelly tested. The difference is that he is his own judge and jury, presiding at his trial and standing in the witness box. If Titus can retain his sanity in the presence of the Black Mass, then all will be well for him, for Gormenghast, for Peake. In Peter McKenzie's words, "There is Gormenghast, and there is Gormenghast. The validity of the one to Titus parallels the validity of the other

to Peake: in each case, there is a total commitment to a reality, however devalued by Cheeta on the one hand, by a world largely indifferent to what Peake had achieved on the other." 58

Titus does experience terrible doubt: "Something began to give way in his brain. Something lost faith in itself. . . . Knowing that all this was a kind of cruel charade, did not seem to help for in the inmost haunts of the imagination he felt the impact" (pp.235-237). And yet, through the very horror of what Cheeta (and Peake) have done, the miracle of Gormenghast is more powerfully recalled. For example, Fuchsia has become a face "blotched with black and sticky tears" and her cheeks are "hectic and raw" as she turns and bays the moon (p.234). But behind this is an image of a loving girl drifting towards a window-sill and falling, "striking her dark head on the sill as she passed" and "already unconscious before the water received her, and drowned her at its ease" (GG, p.454). Behind the featureless, carrot-haired puppet, we see Gertrude drawing "the corner of the sheet up a little further over Fuchsia's shoulder, with an infinite gentleness, as though she feared her child might feel the cold and so must take the risk of waking her" (GG, p.462). Whether these images will simply be food for nostalgia or whether they will become part of a life-enhancing significance depends on the success of the illusion created by Cheeta.

The triumph of the forces of life and the imagination, forces represented by Muzzlehatch throughout the book, is prefigured by the appearance of "the gaunt man" (p.239), and the simultaneous ruin of Cheeta's plans. He is a "giant festooned with rags" (p.239) and, as the moon lent an air of reality to the puppets, he makes it obvious that they are mere toys, tangible and destructible. As the "ravaged god" (p.26) who is both a "beggar" and a "king" (p.239) draws attention to himself and the scientist, so his plot for vengeance disrupts Cheeta's, and the incipient madness that made itself evident as she drummed her fists on her dressing-table becomes, at the moment of crisis, quite explicit. She, who would have mocked madness, is, like Steerpike, turned into an object of mockery and the world of the irrational exacts its own revenge. She screams and spits at the crowd: "This was the once exquisite Cheeta, the queen of ice; the orchid; brilliant of brain and limb" (p.251). She, who would travesty Gormenghast, becomes a travesty of her own world and she and her father

who is "a kind of subtraction" (p.184), flee into the night. The "lard-coloured hummock" (p.185), the cranium that is the only "positive" thing about the scientist (p.185), becomes a nullity in the destruction of his factory.

There is a moment when time is suspended and it is in that moment that Titus's commitment to another person becomes total and, at the same time, the vindication of Gormenghast is achieved:

From where he stood, Titus could see, as though on a stage, the protagonists. Time seemed to draw to a close. The world had lost interest in itself and its positionings. They stood between the coil and the recoil. It was too much. Yet there was no alternative either of the heart or of the head. He could not leave Muzzlehatch. He loved the man. Yes, even now, though the flecks of red burned in his arrogant eyes. Sensing the widespread derangement all about him, Titus was becoming fearful for his own sanity. Yet there is loyalty in dreams, and beauty in madness, and he could not turn from the shaggy side of his friend. (pp.244-245)

"[L]oyalty in dreams, and beauty in madness," love for the dream of Gormenghast, love for Muzzlehatch in his madness -- heart and head merge to see in loyalty to friend and home one and the same thing. But beyond this, the dream of Gormenghast is seen to be a truth more valuable and more powerful than anything the scientist's have created, and Titus's outburst to Cheeta earlier is seen to have the seeds of this truth in it: "I have no dreams! It is you who are unreal. You and your father and your factory" (p.194). Gormenghast can never be exploded as long as there is imagination in the world, but the scientist's factory blows up at the lighting of a fuse, and all that Cheeta can do is acknowledge the failure of her world as "the symbols of mockery and scorn" (p.249) dissolve into greasepaint and sawdust.

So Muzzlehatch twice kills death, but his own disillusionment with the world is deep, even if it is not overwhelming: "Once there were islands all a-sprout with palms: and coral reefs and sands as white as milk. What is there now but a vast shambles of the heart? Filth, squalor, and a world of little men" (p.250). Beyond this vision is Gormenghast, however, and Muzzlehatch dies to defend it from the socialites who, like the mockers of Christ, call out: "There's Gormenghast for you. Why don't you come and prove yourself, my lord?" (p.253). The ragged king steps forward "to annihilate the man" (p.253)

and is stabbed in the back by the Helmets who, like the scientist, have all their strength invested in their heads. "Something of a holocaust, ain't it," whispers Muzzlehatch. "God bless you and your Gormenghast, my boy" (p.254). Our last sight of him shows him "sprawled as though to take the curve of the world" as a "clearer, fresher stain" appears in the sky (pp.255-257). As Titus once redeemed Gormenghast for a mythic innocence, so Muzzlehatch redeems the world for a natural innocence.

This is partly countered by the bleakness of Anchor's vision as he, Titus and Juno, a surviving trinity, fly into the south:

From time to time, as they sped through the upper atmosphere, and while the world unveiled itself, valley by valley, range by range, ocean by ocean, city by city, it seemed that the earth wandered through his skull. . . a cosmos in the bone; a universe lit by a hundred lights and thronged by shapes and shadows; alive with endless threads of circumstance. . . action and event. All futility: disordered; with no end and no beginning. (p.258)

Throughout the last chapters we find the vision of a meaningless world played off against the imaginative world that invests the real with meaning. So, Muzzlehatch's disillusionment is countered by his last words, and Anchor's sense of despair is countered by Titus's determination to answer his mother's call: "Only within himself could he hear a faraway voice calling out. . . . 'Mother. . . mother. . . mother. . . mother. . . where are you? Where. . . are. . . you? Where. . . are. . . you?'" (p.260). The promise of a rebirth is made symbolically when Titus parachutes down and lands in a tree where he lies "unharmed, like a child in a cradle" (p.261), and a return to the beginning is also indicated by reversal: this time the "challenge" of the Mountain is to re-enter his home (p.261), while the cave where he once made a commitment to the Thing and to everything that was not Gormenghast, now becomes a sign identifying all that is Gormenghast. As the dawn salvo booms, it becomes the "proof of his own sanity and love" (p.262).

It is now that the full meaning of his return dawns on Titus: "His heart beat out more rapidly, for something was growing. . . some kind of knowledge. A thrill of the brain. A synthesis. For Titus was recognizing in a flash of retrospect that a new phase of which he was

only half aware, had been reached. It was a sense of maturity, almost of fulfilment. He had no longer any need for home, for he carried his Gormenghast within him" (pp.262-263). The illumination of retrospect, of flashback, echoes the similar experience which Titus has just before he kills Steerpike, but this time he becomes a "man" in a rather different sense than was implied at the climax of Gormenghast.⁵⁹ Now, with his new knowledge, Titus is once more free "to run down the far side of the mountain, not by the track by which he had ascended, but by another that he had never known before" (p.263). Titus has had to come full circle, but the new synthesis which he achieves suggests, not a return to the womb in a simple sense, but an interiorization of the mythic world, and a recognition that the unconscious, which housed all the guilt and the love contained in his relationship to Gormenghast, must be fully integrated into his self-awareness. In the words of Carl Jung:

There is no consciousness without discrimination of opposites. This is the paternal principle, the Logos, which eternally struggles to extricate itself from the primal warmth and primal darkness of the maternal womb; in a word, from unconsciousness. Divine curiosity yearns to be born and does not shrink from conflict, suffering, or sin. Unconsciousness is the primal sin, evil itself, for the Logos. Therefore its first creative act of liberation is matricide, and the spirit that dared all heights and all depths must, as Synesius says, suffer the divine punishment, enchainment on the rocks of the Caucasus. Nothing can exist without its opposite; the two were one in the beginning and will be one again in the end. Consciousness can only exist through continual recognition of the unconscious, just as everything that lives must pass through many deaths. 60

Thus, there is a psychological synthesis for Titus, closely related to his new perception of the need for roots in a mythic world, to prevent a repetition of the rootlessness and alienation from the self that cursed him throughout Titus Alone. Thomas Mann has expressed the importance of the mythical as follows:

While in the life of the human race the mythical is an early and primitive stage, in the life of the individual it is a late and mature one. What is gained is an insight into the higher truth depicted in the actual; smiling

knowledge of the eternal, the ever-being and authentic; a knowledge of the schema in which and according to which the supposed individual lives, unaware, in his naive belief in himself as unique in space and time, of the extent to which his life is but formula and repetition and his path marked out for him by those who trod it before him. . . . His dignity and security lie all unconsciously in the fact that with him something timeless has once more emerged into the light and become present; it is a mythical value added to the otherwise poor and valueless single character; it is native worth, because its origin lies in the unconscious. 61

Finally, at the artistic and imaginative level, there is a synthesis of private and public worlds for Titus, as he heads out on the continuing quest, for, as Northrop Frye has pointed out, the quest romance very frequently "takes on a spiral form, an open circle where the end is the beginning transformed and renewed by the heroic quest,"⁶² and in that renewal is the continuation of the journey. What appeared to be an "ironic" world of dissolution and chaos proves but the beginning of regenerated myth and romance, as Titus reabsorbs the dream world:

The improbable, desiring, erotic, and violent world of romance reminds us that we are not awake when we have abolished the dream world: we are awake only when we have absorbed it again. 63

For Peake, there is also a synthesis. Having subjected his dream world to the mockery and uncomprehending antagonism of the modern age, to holocaust and chaos, to Mr. Gradgrind's "Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!"⁶⁴ he comes to the conclusion that that world not only survives, but is a vital source of power for coming to terms with a world in which there is "no abiding stay," in which the process of becoming is continual and all important. Peake concluded a theoretical piece on drawing with the following words:

The advance from virtual blindness to that state of perception -- half rumination, half scrutiny -- is all that matters. The end is hypothetical. It is the journey that counts. 65

He might have substituted Hardy's "partly real, partly dream" for

the parenthesis in the above passage: it would have implied the same "crazy balance" between the real and the imaginative.

It may be true that Peake did not intend to write a trilogy, but circumstances prevented him from giving us the further adventures of Titus and, in the event, what we have in Titus Groan, Gormenghast, and Titus Alone is a coherent trilogy that works through the pattern of growth experienced by Everyman, from his origins in myth and ritual as externalized structures, through a stage of rebellion and distancing, and the entry of the individual into history, to a recognition of the Self within the Other, the temporal within the eternal in the lovely dance of the spheres.

For Peake as artist, these novels are also a journey of exploration into the relationship between inner and outer worlds, to find that the imagination both draws on the real and infuses the real with a precious sense of wonder that enables him to see the god in the acorn.

EPILOGUE

There is a description of Gormenghast that is full of the baroque splendour of imagery that Peake displays at his best:

The walls of Gormenghast were like the walls of paradise or the walls of an inferno. The colours were devilish or angelical according to the colour of the mind that watched them. They swam, those walls, with the hues of hell, with the tints of Zion. The breasts of the plumaged seraphim; the scales of Satan.
(GG,p.263)

The ambivalence expressed here is central to Peake's vision of the world, a world loved, loathed, adored, despised, but a world which he could not escape, until illness laid siege to his mind. One of his most stirring poems is the following:

To live at all is miracle enough.
The doom of nations is another thing.
Here in my hammering blood-pulse is my proof.

Let every painter paint and poet sing
And all the sons of music ply their trade;
Machines are weaker than a beetle's wing.

Swung out of sunlight into cosmic shade,
Come what come may the imagination's heart
Is constellation high and can't be weighed.

Nor greed nor fear can tear our faith apart
When every heart-beat hammers out the proof
That life itself is miracle enough.

Right to the end, even when confronting the starkness and decay of a world without Pegasus, Peake believed that the imaginative world is sustaining. Far from being an escape route, it sends us back to the miracle of life, "down the far side of the mountain" to find both "the plumaged Seraphim" and "the scales of Satan."

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Introduction

¹ Elizabeth Sewell, in her book, The Field of Nonsense (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952), observes: "The Nonsense universe must be the sum of its parts and nothing more. . . . Part must be separate and distinct from part, wholes must be analysable into parts, and the total construction must be no more than a detached product of the conscious mind which must never identify itself with its production in any way" (p.98). Of course, it is debatable whether any Nonsense writer is as rigorously detached as Sewell seems to imply, but if we analyse the passage from Titus Alone we see that the tendency to weep over the presence of the poet is controlled by his juxtaposition with the chaff and the riff-raff, and the romantic connotations of the outcast are undermined by putting him in the company of rag-pickers. The "failures of the earth" thus becomes subject to the strict logic of "one and one and one and one and one" (Sewell, ch. 5), discrete units defying the harmonizing tendencies of the emotions of love and compassion. Peake takes the risk of sustaining the tension between the control and detachment of Nonsense and their imminent collapse in the violence of the struggle between Titus and Veil, and the pathos of the Black Rose.

² T.S. Eliot. "Burnt Norton," Four Quartets in Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 11.42-43.

³ Susan Sontag uses the phrase to describe the "Happenings" of the sixties in Against Interpretation (New York, 1966; rpt. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967), p.263.

⁴ Leslie Fiedler, Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self (New York: Touchstone-Simon and Schuster, 1979), p.31.

⁵ Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop, introd. Malcolm Andrews (1841; ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.73.

⁶ Carson McCullers, The Member of the Wedding (U.S.A., 1946; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p.27.

⁷ McCullers, p.28.

⁸ Charles Chaplin, dir., The Circus, United Artists, 1928;

Orson Welles, dir., The Lady From Shanghai, Columbia, 1946.

⁹ The trapeze artist as image of romance and object of envy makes his appearance in the popular song:

He flies through the air with the greatest of ease,
That daring young man on the flying trapeze,
His movements were graceful, all girls he could please,
And my love he's stolen from me.

¹⁰ Maeve Gilmore, A World Away: A Memoir of Mervyn Peake (London: Gollancz, 1970) p.107.

¹¹ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "Constantly risking absurdity," in Inscapes, comp. Robin Malan (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.116.

¹² Mervyn Peake, "In Crazy Balance," in Selected Poems (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p.9.

¹³ W.B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," in Collected Poems (London: Macmillan, 1950), p.217.

¹⁴ One of the achievements of the modernists was to draw the reader into this process of patterning the world. When T.S. Eliot writes: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," he bids us do the same with the fragments of his poem (The Waste Land in Collected Poems, l.430).

¹⁵ Frank Kermode, The Sense of An Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.106.

¹⁶ Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, ed. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), V,i,11.16-17.

¹⁷ Yeats, Collected Poems, p.391.

¹⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," in Tree and Leaf (1964; rpt. London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1975), pp.40-41.

¹⁹ Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion (London: Methuen, 1981), p.154.

²⁰ Jackson, p.163.

²¹ Henry James, from Preface to The American in Novelists on the Novel, by Miriam Allott (1959; rpt. London: Routledge Pb.,1965),p.56.

²² S.T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson (1817;ed. London: Dent, 1975), p.167.

²³ Fred Inglis, The Promise of Happiness: Value and Meaning in Children's Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.186.

²⁴ T.S. Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral (1935; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p.18.

²⁵ That Peake felt something of this is revealed by a deeply moving letter which he wrote to his wife from Virginia Water Hospital in 1958:

I have almost lost my identity -- I long for your white arms around my neck. I am afraid of something subtle. It is the smell of the place -- its miles and miles of corridors -- the expression on the faces -- some of whom have been here for years.

I will never write about mad people again -- I am in a kind of dream -- or nightmare, and I yearn for your touch.

Maeve! Never! Never again! It has done something to me. I have played too much around the edge of madness -- oh I could cry to be free. (Gilmore, p.128)

²⁶ Eliot, "Burnt Norton," Four Quartets, l.47.

Chapter One : A Pilgrim's Progress

¹ The lines come from the Author's Apology to The Pilgrim's Progress (1678; rpt. London: George Routledge, 1904), p.24.

² Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (1957;rpt.Princeton: Princeton University Press, Paperback, 1971), pp.249-250.

³ Jorge Luis Borges, "Avatars of the Tortoise," in Labyrinths (U.S.A., 1964; rpt. Harmondsworth: King Penguin, 1981), p.243.

⁴ Sir Walter Scott, from the Introductory Epistle to The Fortunes of Nigel, in Allott, p.230.

⁵ See Gormenghast, pp. 424, 460 and Titus Alone, p.12, resp.

⁶ See below, p.61.

⁷ Mervyn Peake, "London Fantasy," in Mervyn Peake: Writings and Drawings, comp. Maeve Gilmore and Shelagh Johnson (London: Academy Editions, 1974), p.78

⁸ John Batchelor, in his book, Mervyn Peake: A Biographical and Critical Exploration (London: Duckworth, 1974), makes a similar point: "A gentle man who devoted his own life to his art, he recognised aggressive masculinity as something that most men have, but which was missing from his own temperament. All his poems about the male 'alien' have a quality of excited enquiry into the unknown. . . ." (pp. 142-143).

⁹ Eliot, "A Game of Chess," The Waste Land, l.128.

- ¹⁰ William Blake, "Holy Thursday," in Blake: Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Paperback, 1969), p. 122, l.5.
- ¹¹ See, too, Batchelor, p.143.
- ¹² Peake, "London Fantasy," p.78.
- ¹³ Oscar Wilde, The Decay of Lying, in Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, introd. Vyvyan Holland (London: Collins, 1966),p.990.
- ¹⁴ Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," pp. 990-991.
- ¹⁵ The storm that accompanies the death of the Thing suggests a similar sense of the loss of a naturally integrated being.
- ¹⁶ Margaret Blount, Animal Land: The Creatures of Children's Fiction (New York: Avon Books, 1977), p.97.
- ¹⁷ Roland Barthes, Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (Paris, 1957; ed. London: Granada, 1973),pp. 151-152.
- ¹⁸ Salvador Dali, "La Conquête de l'irrationnel," in The History of Surrealism, Maurice Nadeau, trans. Richard Howard (France, 1964; ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.336.
- ¹⁹ Quoted by Roger Shattuck in his Introduction to The History of Surrealism, p.22.
- ²⁰ G.K. Chesterton, "The Donkey," in Essays and Belles-Lettres (London: Dent, 1935), p.283, ll.1-2.
- ²¹ Shattuck, Introduction to The History of Surrealism,pp.25-26.
- ²² Sigmund Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, trans. James Strachey, rev. Angela Richards (1905; ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 174-175.
- ²³ Freud, Jokes, p.176.
- ²⁴ Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (U.S.A.,1961; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p.331.
- ²⁵ C.W.E. Bigsby, Dada and Surrealism (London: Methuen, 1972), p.56.
- ²⁶ Sewell, see note 1 to the Introduction above.
- ²⁷ Sewell, Nonsense, p.1.
- ²⁸ Sewell, Nonsense,p.27.
- ²⁹ Sewell, Nonsense,p.149.
- ³⁰ Sewell, Nonsense,p.114.
- ³¹ Roger B. Henkle, Comedy and Culture: England 1820-1900 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980),p.204.

³² Vivien Noakes, Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer (1968; rpt. Glasgow: Fontana-Collins, 1979), p.231.

³³ Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass, illus. Mervyn Peake (Stockholm, 1946; rpt. London: Methuen, 1978), p.171.

³⁴ Irving Massey, The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), p.11.

³⁵ Massey, The Gaping Pig, p.11.

³⁶ Jackson, Fantasy, pp.38-40.

³⁷ Jackson, Fantasy, p.40.

³⁸ Eric Drake, "Lost Archives," The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 4 (Spring, 1977), 9.

³⁹ Jackson, Fantasy, p.162.

⁴⁰ Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p.333. One may note the connection between the desire to create by naming and the mythmaking consciousness. According to Ernst Cassirer: "The original bond between the linguistic and the mythico-religious consciousness is primarily expressed in the fact that all verbal structures appear as also mythical entities, endowed with certain mythical powers, that the Word, in fact, becomes a sort of primary force, in which all being and doing originate. . . . Whatever has been fixed by a name, henceforth is not only real, but is Reality " :Language and Myth, trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Dover, 1946), pp.44-45, 58.

⁴¹ Walter de la Mare, "Lewis Carroll," in Children and Literature: Views and Reviews, ed. Virginia Haviland (London: Bodley Head, 1975), p.58.

⁴² Maeve Gilmore, Introd., A Book of Nonsense, by Mervyn Peake (London: Picador, 1974), p.13.

⁴³ Noakes, Edward Lear, p.233.

⁴⁴ Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 265.

⁴⁵ Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p.333.

⁴⁶ Blount, Animal Land, p.104.

⁴⁷ Franz Kafka, Metamorphosis, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (1916; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961):

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. . . . However violently he forced himself towards his right side he always rolled on to his back again. He tried it at least a hundred times, shutting his eyes to keep from seeing his struggling legs, and only desisted

when he began to feel in his side a faint dull ache he had never experienced before.

O God, he thought, what an exhausting job I've picked on! Travelling about day in, day out. (p.9)

⁴⁸ Mervyn Peake, Letters From A Lost Uncle (1948; rpt. London: Picador, 1977).

_____, Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor (1939; rpt. London: Academy Editions, 1967).

⁴⁹ In The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (1952; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), Lewis gives the following description of the Silver Sea: "Whiteness, shot with faintest colour of gold, spread round them on every side, except just astern where their passage had thrust the lilies apart and left an open lane of water that shone like dark green glass. To look at, this sea was very like the Arctic. . ." (p.200). In The Magician's Nephew (1955; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), we have this description of the great Aslan singing the world into being, providing an interesting counterpart to Peake's lion at the end of time:

The earth was of many colours: they were fresh, hot, and vivid. They made you feel excited; until you saw the Singer himself, and then you forgot everything else.

It was a Lion. Huge, shaggy, and bright, it stood facing the risen sun. Its mouth was wide open in song and it was about three hundred yards away. (pp.95-96)

⁵⁰ Roger Duvoisin, "Children's Book Illustration: The Pleasures and Problems," in Haviland, p.180.

⁵¹ Blount, Animal Land, p.109.

⁵² Blount, Animal Land, p.110.

⁵³ Mervyn Peake, Rhymes Without Reason (1944; rpt. London: Methuen, 1974).

⁵⁴ Maurice Sendak, "Mother Goose's Garnishings," in Haviland, p.194.

⁵⁵ Frances Clarke Sayers, "Walt Disney Accused," an interview with Charles M. Weisenberg, in Haviland, p.120.

⁵⁶ Frances Clarke Sayers, "Walt Disney Accused," a letter to the Los Angeles Times, in Haviland, pp.116-117.

⁵⁷ Mervyn Peake, "Alice and Tenniel and Me," a talk transmitted by the BBC on 12 December, 1954, in The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 6 (Spring, 1978), 21.

⁵⁸ Mervyn Peake, "Book Illustration," a talk transmitted by the BBC on 20 May, 1947, in the series "As I See It," in The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 9 (Autumn, 1979) 14.

⁵⁹ Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (U.S.A., 1960; rpt. London: Granada, 1970), p.263.

⁶⁰ G.K. Chesterton, "A Defense of Nonsense," in Essays and Belles-Lettres, pp.126-127.

⁶¹ Roger Sale, Fairy Tales and After: From Snow White to E.B. White (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), p.8.

⁶² C.S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," in Haviland, p.239.

⁶³ Mervyn Peake, "Alice and Tenniel and Me," p.22.

⁶⁴ John Donne, Sonnet 5, "Divine Meditations," Holy Sonnets, in John Donne: The Complete English Poems, ed. A.J. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.310.

⁶⁵ Mervyn Peake, Mr Slaughterboard, in Peake's Progress, ed. Maeve Gilmore, introd. John Watney (London: Allen Lane, 1978), pp.63-94.

⁶⁶ Roger Sale, Fairy Tales and After, pp.14-15.

⁶⁷ Shakespeare, The Tempest, ed. Frank Kermode (London: The Arden Edition, Methuen, 1964), V, i, ll.183-184.

⁶⁸ Like Ahab, Slaughterboard is a figure of mystery to his crew: "There were so many sayings about him, but it was difficult to know where the truth ended and the fable began" (p.65). Like Ishmael, Slaughterboard flees to the sea to escape women, the land, settled existence: "Mr Slaughterboard had never been on land in his life, and he had no intention of going. The idea frightened him. He had once seen a picture of a woman too. That also frightened him. The land and women seemed somehow to bring to him the same feeling of dismay" (p.83). The flight from women is emphasised, too, by the fact that Slaughterboard's alienating grotesqueness is an inheritance from his mother: "Her face, he could remember, was hideous, and very large, and so multitudinously wrinkled that one could not for certain locate the mouth. One of the wrinkles would open and then one would know" (p.65).

⁶⁹ Werner Herzog, dir., Aguirre, Wrath of God, Werner Herzog Hessischer-Rundfunk, 1972.

⁷⁰ Mervyn Peake, Mr Pye, (1953; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

⁷¹ The term "pan-determinism" is used by Tzvetan Todorov in his book The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1973). He suggests that "on the most abstract level, pan-determinism signifies that the limit between the physical and the mental, between matter and spirit, between word and thing, ceases to be impervious" (p.113).

⁷² T.S. Eliot, "The Hippopotamus," in Collected Poems, p.51. 11.25-28.

⁷³ Elizabeth Sewell, "Lewis Carroll and T.S. Eliot as Nonsense Poets," in Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as seen through the Critics' Looking-Glasses 1865-1971, ed. Robert Phillips (U.S.A., 1971; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p.162.

⁷⁴ Massey, The Gaping Pig, pp.17-19.

⁷⁵ Chesterton, "A Defense of Nonsense," p.127.

⁷⁶ Frye, Anatomy, pp.39 and 41.

⁷⁷ In his book on The Grotesque (London: Methuen, 1972), Philip Thomson offers the following definition of the grotesque: it is "the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response. It is significant that this clash is paralleled by the ambivalent nature of the abnormal as present in the grotesque: we might consider a secondary definition of the grotesque to be 'the ambivalently abnormal'" (p.27).

⁷⁸ Vittorio de Sica, dir., Miracle in Milan, Produziona De Sica, 1950.

⁷⁹ Luis Buñuel, dir., Nazarin, prod. Manuel Barbachano Ponce, 1958.

⁸⁰ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses," in Malan, p. 45, 11.6-7.

⁸¹ Charles Baudelaire, quoted in XIX Siècle Les Grands Auteurs Français du Programme, by André Lagarde and Laurent Michard (Paris: Bordas, 1969), p. 430.

⁸² Charles Baudelaire, "Au Lecteur," in Les Fleurs du Mal introd. Antoine Adam (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1961), p.5.

⁸³ Blake, Complete Writings, p.214, l.4.

Yeats's line "A terrible beauty is born" is from "Easter 1916" in Collected Poems, p.202. I have taken some liberties with its contextual significance, although the words "terrible beauty" seem

to have appealed to Peake (see "I Cannot Give the Reasons," 11.13-14).

⁸⁴ Ado Kyrrou, writing on "Monsters" in Buñuel's film, in The World of Luis Buñuel: Essays in Criticism, ed. Joan Mellen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) makes the point that "Buñuel is Spanish and a surrealist. He is therefore attracted to monsters, to those beings behind the walls of di Chirico's paintings and who haunt Goya's. In all of Buñuel's work the unusual, that is to say the monstrous (I do not consider this word as necessarily pejorative) enjoys an open house" (p.214). He goes on to point out that the moral monstrosity of the priest's inhuman sanctity is condemned in the film, while the dwarf, loving and generous, can "enjoy Buñuel's entire sympathy" (p.215).

⁸⁵ Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony, trans. Angus Davidson, foreward by Frank Kermode (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), see esp. chs. 1 and 2.

⁸⁶ Mervyn Peake, Same Time, Same Place in Peake's Progress, pp.143-150. (First published in Science Fantasy, 1963).

⁸⁷ Titus is to have a similar experience with Cheeta. He, however, has also had the enriching experience of Juno, an authentic goddess of love.

⁸⁸ Mervyn Peake, Danse Macabre in Peake's Progress, pp.134-142. (First published in Science Fantasy, 1963).

⁸⁹ Jean Renoir, La Grande Illusion, trans. Marianne Alexandre and Andrew Sinclair (France, 1964; rpt. London: Lorrimer, 1968), p.8.

⁹⁰ There is an interesting similarity between this poem and Henry Reed's "Naming of Parts" (in Malan, p.139), where we have an interplay between army instruction and the smell of the flowers, their beauty and their silent eloquence.

⁹¹ Mervyn Peake, The Rhyme of the Flying Bomb in Peake's Progress, pp.445-468 (First published in 1962, having been written in 1949, and mislaid).

⁹² R.S. Furness, Expressionism (London: Methuen, 1973), p.9.

⁹³ Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.158.

⁹⁴ Luke, 2 v. 10 (King James Version).

⁹⁵ One of the central issues in the Titus books is the inter-relationship between "me" and the "other" of which the "me" is a part.

⁹⁶ Yeats, "The Second Coming," in Collected Poems, p.210.

Steerpike will also burn books and bear the mark of the beast after the fire that destroys Barquentine.

⁹⁷ Eliot, "Burnt Norton," Four Quartets, 1.62.

⁹⁸ Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, in Collected Poems, p. 13, ll.26 and 31-33.

⁹⁹ Donne, Sonnet 14, "Divine Meditation," Holy Sonnets, in The Complete English Poems, p.314, 1.1.

¹⁰⁰ As Cheeta's latent madness begins to erupt, we read that "[a]great blood-coloured stone winked at her breast as though it spelled out some secret code" (TA,p.242).

¹⁰¹ The image is picked up again at the end of Titus Alone when Anchor has his despairing vision of the world, a vision of darkness and chaos, as "the earth wandered through his skull. . . a cosmos in the bone" (TA,p.258). The dark labyrinths of the mind are the labyrinths of the madhouse, of Gormenghast, of the world.

¹⁰² Gilmore and Johnson, Writings and Drawings, p.119.

¹⁰³ R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.110.

Chapter Two : Titus Groan

¹ "A world surrounded by a wall" was Peake's description of his home in China ("Notes for a Projected Autobiography" in Peake's Progress, p.473). The lines of poetry are from "It Worries me to Know" in A Book of Nonsense, p.27, ll. 109-114.

² John Watney, Mervyn Peake (London: Abacus, 1977), p.66.

³ Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.72.

⁴ Lewis Carroll, The Hunting of the Snark, illus. Mervyn Peake (1941; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1953). It is interesting to note that Carroll rejected Henry Holiday's illustration of the Boojum. According to Holiday, "Mr Dodgson wrote that it was a delightful monster, but that it was inadmissible. All his descriptions of the Boojum were quite unimaginable, and he wanted the creature to remain so " (quoted by Martin Gardner in The Annotated Snark, U.S.A., 1962; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.18. Peake could resist the temptation as little as Holiday could, but produced a

radically different monster, clearly defined and angular, flying through the air, where Holiday's monster looks rather like one of Peake's drawings of Swelter -- shifting volumes of light over an imponderable weight.

⁵ Mervyn Peake, "Book Illustration," 14.

⁶ Hugh Brogan, "The Gutters of Gormenghast," Cambridge Review, (23 November, 1973), p.39.

⁷ Henry Tube, "Mervyn Peake," Spectator (15 July, 1966), p.81.

⁸ Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.19

⁹ Mervyn Peake, "The Reader Takes Over," an interview recorded with Peake by the BBC on 20 June, 1947, in The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 10 (Spring 1980), 6.

¹⁰ Edwin Morgan, "The Walls of Gormenghast," Chicago Review, 14 (Autumn-Winter, 1960), 74.

¹¹ Morgan, "The Walls of Gormenghast," p.80.

¹² Thomas Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd (1874; rpt. London: Pan, 1967), p.5

¹³ William Faulkner, Interview with Jean Stein in William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, introd. and ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery, (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p.82

¹⁴ Mervyn Peake, "The Reader Takes Over," 8.

¹⁵ Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), pp. 17 and 30.

¹⁶ Michael Irwin, Picturing: Description and Illusion in the Nineteenth Century Novel (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), p.4

¹⁷ Edmund Little, "Gogol's Town of NN. and Peake's Gormenghast: The Realism of Fantasy," Journal of Russian Studies, 34 (1977), 17. Christine Brooke-Rose has some interesting criticisms of the kind of fantasy that draws on the techniques of realism, In her book, A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, especially of the Fantastic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), she suggests that Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings is a case of "The Unreal as Real" (Pt. IV, ch.9). It is an example of the marvellous (understood by Todorov to be the creation of a world that is clearly supernatural) invaded by the techniques of realism:

The techniques of realism, when invading the marvellous

have a very curious effect. For they not only weigh down and flatten out the narrative like an iron, they actually change its genre, or come very near to doing so. They do not of course change it into realistic narrative: the presence of the marvellous is too pervasive. Above all, the presence of a wholly invented and wholly unfamiliar (and magical) megatext makes a realistic narrative impossible.

This invented megatext, however, combined with all the realistic texts. . . pushes the narrative into allegory, or very nearly. . . . The fictional megatext, technically modelled as it is on the 'real' megatext of realistic fiction, produces allegory, precisely because it can only give 'the effect of the real' by analogy, and the realistic mechanisms encourage the reader to project his megatextual habits onto the fictional megatext, which is in fact pretty close to mid twentieth-century history. . . . The marvellous and the realistic are not so much blended as bathetically juxtaposed" (pp.254-255).

It is of interest to note that Peake found The Lord of the Rings "twee" (quoted by John Wood, "A Pupil Remembers," in The Mervyn Peake Review, 12, Spring, 1981, 25), and the allegorical levels of his own fictional world are considerably muted by the fact that that world is not "wholly unfamiliar" and certainly not magical. Furthermore, the ideological foundation is much more generalized and ambiguous -- a romantic revolt and a conservative longing in complex interaction.

¹⁸ Jackson, Fantasy, pp. 123-124.

¹⁹ Jackson, Fantasy, pp.130-132.

²⁰ Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p.157.

²¹ Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics (London: Methuen, 1977), p.17.

_____, Metaphor (London: Methuen, 1972), pp.43, 39.

²² Todorov, The Fantastic, p. 168.

²³ Jackson, Fantasy, p.36.

²⁴ Eliot, "Burnt Norton," Four Quartets, V, ll. 14-15.

²⁵ J.B. Baronian, Panorama de la littérature fantastique de langue française (Paris: Stock, 1978), p.23.

²⁶ Irène Bessière, quoted by Baronian, p.299.

²⁷ Stephen Prickett, Victorian Fantasy (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester, 1979), p. xvi.

²⁸ Prickett, Victorian Fantasy, p. 146.

²⁹ Todorov, The Fantastic, pp.41-42. Todorov expands as follows:

"If he [the reader] decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we may say the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvellous.

" The fantastic . . . seems to be located on the frontier of two genres, the marvellous and the uncanny. . ." (p.41).

³⁰ Jackson, Fantasy, pp.34-35.

³¹ Todorov, The Fantastic, p.57. Eric Rabkin also attempts to reconcile the "escapist" forms of literature with the ideas of both compensation and discovery: "As the fantastic involves a diametric reversal of the ground rules within a narrative world, a narrative world itself may offer a diametric reversal of the ground rules of the extra-textual world. . . .Escape in literature is a fantastic reversal, and therefore not a surrender to chaos. . . . escape from the prison of the mind is not. . . easily had. If the restraint is grounded in one's perceptions of oneself or of the nature of the world, mere change is not enough: one needs a compensating change, a diametric reversal. . . . In the literature of the fantastic, escape is the means of exploration of an unknown land, a land which is the underside of the mind of man": The Fantastic in Literature (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977), pp.42, 45.

³² C.S. Lewis, "Fairy Stories," in Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966). Lewis says the following: "The Fantastic or Mythical [is able to] generalize while remaining concrete, to present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences but whole classes of experience, and to throw off irrelevancies. But at its best it can do more; it can give us experiences we have never had and thus, instead of 'commenting on life,' can add to it" (p.38). Lewis's view that the fantastic is equivalent to the mythical is also apparent in a letter he wrote to Mervyn Peake: "People now all seem to want 'a slice of life' (the flaccid, tepid, grey-to-brown shapeless object is a better image than they know) or the 'comment on life'. To me those who merely comment on experience seem far less valuable than those who add to it, who make me experience what I never experienced before. I would not for anything have missed Gormenghast. It has the hallmark of a true myth: i.e. you have seen nothing like it before you read the book, but

after that you see things like it everywhere. What one may call the "the Gormenghastly" has given me a New Universal; particulars to put inside it are never in short supply." (Quoted in Gilmore and Johnson, p.83).

³³ Richard Hurd, Letters on Chivalry and Romance (1762; rpt. London: Frowde, 1911), p.138.

³⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables (1851; rpt. New York: Norton, 1967), p.1.

³⁵ Gillian Beer, The Romance (London: Methuen, 1970), pp.3 and 9.

³⁶ Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978). Bettelheim comments: "The fairy tale simplifies all situations. Its figures are clearly drawn; and details, unless very important, are eliminated. All characters are typical rather than unique" (p.8). It is out of this typicality that the universal pattern of human growth emerges: "This growth process begins with the resistance against the parents and fear of growing up, and ends when youth has truly found itself, achieved psychological independence and moral maturity, and no longer views the other sex as threatening or demonic, but is able to relate positively to it" (p.12). This is the pattern which Titus is to follow.

³⁷ Robert Scholes, Fabulation and Metafiction (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), pp. 3 and 15.

³⁸ Frye, The Secular Scripture, p.36.

³⁹ Frye, The Secular Scripture, p.138.

⁴⁰ John G. Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 35-36. I have omitted the examples he gives to elaborate on these points, but adapt them in the following suggestions:

It might be useful to elaborate on the way in which Cawelti's suggestions are relevant to the Titus books. In these books we see how the plot affirms the epic hero who defends the community against a "Fascist" usurper, resolving the tension between individualistic violence and social order. In *Steerpike* we have an intriguing but diabolical villain with whose energy and intelligence we can safely sympathise, because he has to die in the end. Cawelti uses the examples of the Western and the Gangster films to illustrate these

points, and they offer suggestive parallels for the roles played by Titus, the lone ranger who cleans up the town and then rides out on the eternal quest, and Steerpike, whose successful rise to power must be punished, or, in the words of Robert Warshow, in his book The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture, introd.Lionel Trilling (New York: Atheneum, 1970) "[t]he gangster movie. . . is a story of enterprise and success ending in precipitate failure. Success is conceived as an increasing power to work injury, it belongs to the city, and it is of course a form of evil. . ." (p.135). The Westerner, on the other hand, does not seek to "extend his dominion but only to assert his personal value" (p.143). This is where much of Titus's conflict lies -- between the defense of the community and the assertion of "personal value."

⁴¹ Mervyn Peake, "What is Drawing?" in The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 15 (Autumn, 1982), 3.

⁴² C.N. Manlove, Modern Fantasy: Five Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.208.

⁴³ Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.82.

⁴⁴ David Punter, The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions, from 1765 to the present day (London: Longman, 1980), p.376.

⁴⁵ Harry Blamires, Twentieth Century English Literature (n.p.: Macmillan, 1982), p.177.

⁴⁶ Gilmore, A World Away, p.121.

⁴⁷ Batchelor (Mervyn Peake, pp.82-85) draws attention to the birth of Peake's sons as a motivating factor for the centrality of the birth theme in the novel. This does not fully explain the diabolical nature of Steerpike's "birth" out of Swelter's kitchen, although his delight in the "lebensraum" of the roofscapes certainly recalls a "public event" personified by another megalomaniac. Steerpike is even seen, startlingly unexpected, for we do not yet know how he has escaped, "looking at himself in a mirror and examining an insipid moustache" (p.101).

⁴⁸ Mervyn Peake, "Book Illustration," p.16.

⁴⁹ Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.72.

⁵⁰ Colin Greenland, "From Beowulf to Kafka: The Difficulty of Titus Alone," The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 12 (Spring, 1981), 7.

⁵¹ Herman Servotte, "Guide For Gormenghast: Mervyn Peake's Trilogy," The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 3 (Autumn, 1976), 9.

⁵² Michael Moorcock provides the information about Otranto in "Architect of the Extraordinary: The Work of Mervyn Peake," Vector, 9 (June, 1960), 16.

⁵³ Peter Conrad, The Victorian Treasure-House (London: Collins, 1973), p.28.

⁵⁴ Conrad, The Victorian Treasure-House, p.30

⁵⁵ Conrad, The Victorian Treasure-House, p.28.

⁵⁶ Conrad, The Victorian Treasure-House, p.65.

⁵⁷ Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto, in Shorter Novels: Eighteenth Century, introd. Philip Henderson (London: Dent, 1930), p.117.

Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794; rpt. London: Dent, 1931), p.230.

Edgar Allan Poe, The Fall of the House of Usher in The Portable Poe, ed. Philip van Doren Stern (New York: Viking, 1945), p.245.

⁵⁸ Punter, The Literature of Terror, p. 416.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth MacAndrew, The Gothic Tradition in Fiction (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 3.

⁶⁰ MacAndrew, The Gothic Tradition, p.8.

⁶¹ Gay Clifford, The Transformations of Allegory (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), pp.89 and 92. MacAndrew also notes the importance of the "pathetic fallacy" in Gothic settings: "To uncover the symbolic manifestations that are the country of the mind, the heirs of the enlightenment brought back out of the wilderness, the bogs and mountain fastnesses, the most emotion-laden images they knew, symbolic figures and landscapes from the dark, irrational past" (The Gothic Tradition, p.48). The ironic relationship between enlightenment, reason and the irrational is something explored by Peake in Titus Alone.

⁶² Clifford, Allegory, p.92.

⁶³ MacAndrew, The Gothic Tradition, pp. 48-49.

⁶⁴ Montague Summers, The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel (London: Fortune, 1938), p.189. Devendra P. Varma also tends to wax sentimental over the nature of the Gothic, seeing it in terms of Romantic mysticism, in The Gothic Flame: Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England. . . (New York: Russell and Russell, 1957): "Primarily the Gothic novels arose out of a quest for the numinous.

They are characterized by an awestruck apprehension of Divine immanence penetrating diurnal reality" (p.211).

⁶⁵ Michael Sadleir, quoted in Varma, The Gothic Flame, p.218.

⁶⁶ William Gaunt, Bandits in a Landscape: A Study of Romantic Painting From Caravaggio to Delacroix (London: The Studio, 1937), p.102.

⁶⁷ Clifford also points to the maze without a centre: "The castle has analogies with the Daedalian maze, but Gormenghast has no Minotaur at the centre, because there is no heart to the building, no focus, architectural or moral. . . ." (Allegory, p.91). This is true only in a local sense. At the level of the mythic patterns that are developed in the novel, there seems to be a coherent moral structure.

⁶⁸ Kenneth Clarke, The Gothic Revival: An Essay on the History of Taste (London: John Murray, 1962), p.44.

Orson Welles's Citizen Kane (RKO, 1941) can be seen as his scream against Hollywood with its synthetic values, revealing its dark underside.

⁶⁹ Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, trans. F. Hopman (1924; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), p.41.

⁷⁰ See TG, p.412, and GG, p.7, for examples.

⁷¹ See Peake's very interesting poem, "When God Pared His Fingernails," in Selected Poems, p.24

When God had pared his fingernails
He found that only nine
Lay on the golden tablet
Where the silver curves recline
When they have left his hands of cloud
And gleam in one lone line.

'Rebellion!' cried the Angels 'Where
Has flown the Nail of Sin?
I saw it running through cold skies
Last night; so fierce and thin
A silver shape, that ran
And ran -- it was the moon.

⁷² Peake demonstrated his approach to people in his radio talk, "Alice and Tenniel and Me":

London, famous for its eccentrics, was at my elbow -- and it was with a sense of excited speculation that I hung around the streets, on the qui vive for those occasional characters who pass and are gone, but whose faces never quite fade from the memory. I felt like a head hunter with a pencil instead of a spear.

But not one of all the types were right as they stood.

They were potential Walruses, or potential Carpenters. The minor adjustments of proportion were always necessary before they were physically equipped to enter so fantastic a climate as Lewis Carroll's Wonderland.

The Mad Hatter was almost perfect, but not quite. I saw him in a telephone box at Charing Cross. The Red Queen, or nearly the Red Queen, bumped into me in Holborn Underground.

I all but heard her cry,
"Off with his head!"

(24)

⁷³ Manlove, Modern Fantasy, p.219.

⁷⁴ The concept of the "eternal return" is examined extensively by Mircea Eliade in The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History, trans. Willard R. Trask (Paris, 1949; ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Paperback, 1971).

⁷⁵ Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture, trans. R.F.C. Hull (1944; ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), pp.5, 25-26.

⁷⁶ Susanne Langer, Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942), p.155.

⁷⁷ Langer, Philosophy, p.158

⁷⁸ Clyde Kluckhohn, "Myths and Rituals: A General Theory," in Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice, ed. John B. Vickery (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp.41-43.

⁷⁹ Joseph Campbell, "Bios and Mythos: Prolegomena to a Science of Mythology," in Vickery, p.21

⁸⁰ Eliade, Eternal Return, p.36

⁸¹ Eliade, Eternal Return, p.89. Peake must have imbibed some of this archaic spirit from his childhood in China. Hugo Portisch, writing on "The Center of the Earth: The Middle Kingdom" in China: Readings on the Middle Kingdom, ed. Leon Hellerman and Alan L. Stein (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973) tells of how he visited the "Temple of Heaven": "On reaching the topmost terrace, one is struck by a curious geometric arrangement. The ground is covered with large stone slabs, arranged in bands around the center point. . . . In the exact center lies a round stone. 'This is the center of the earth,' said my guide" (pp. 10-11).

⁸² Manlove, Modern Fantasy, p.229. Manlove also notes the defiance

of sequence in the first half of the book, describing it as "a loop in the temporal sequence" (p.226).

⁸³ There are not only structural links between sub-plot and main plot. There are also clear thematic links between the sub-plot, with Keda at its centre, and the main interest of the novel with Gormenghast at its centre, the theme of the search for love being the most obvious point in common. Leslie Fiedler sees in the Gothic a substitution of terror for love as the focus (Love and Death, p.126), which suggests, perhaps, that the Keda passages are meant to emphasise this lack of love as a controlling and unifying centre in Gormenghast, where terror comes to dominate, while the love we do see is expressed in little pockets of isolation -- usually with Fuchsia at the centre. Peake later reprimanded himself for making Keda too much like "a character in Cold Comfort Farm", the novel by Stella Gibbons (presumably he was referring to Elfine). But Fuchsia is much more like this wild girl and the possibility of Peake making a mistake suggests the similarity between Keda and Fuchsia (not least the similarities in their suicides). The anecdote comes from the article by John Wood, "Mervyn Peake: A Pupil Remembers" p.19.

⁸⁴ Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 81.

⁸⁵ Huizinga, Homo Ludens, p.166.

⁸⁶ Huizinga, Homo Ludens, p.167.

⁸⁷ John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: BBC and Penguin, 1972), esp. ch. 1.

⁸⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: M I T Press, 1968), pp. 57 and 34.

⁸⁹ Bakhtin, Rabelais, p.6

⁹⁰ In Bakhtin's words: "While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants" (p.7).

⁹¹ In this sense, The Grey Scrubbers are also an indictment of mass-produced, media-controlled modern man.

⁹² Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo, trans. James Strachey (1913; ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, **Paperback**, 1960), p.44.

⁹³ See above, pp. 55-56.

⁹⁴ Ronald Binns has this to say on the relationship between

addendum to note 94: for Manlove's criticisms see Modern Fantasy, pp. 232 ff.

while his mother's name, Gertrude, immediately suggests Hamlet, another enclosed, suffocating castle world" (26). Steerpike standing aside and glowering at the kitchen festivities also recalls the opening act of Hamlet.

Binns continues: "Gormenghast seems to pun on 'gore' and 'ghastly,' while 'groan' recurs throughout Shakespeare with a sexual double meaning. Peake's visionary world certainly contains the neurotic and murderous elements of the latter play, and the violence and uncertainty of tone of the former" (26). The initial spelling of "Gor(e)menghast" lends weight to Binns's suggestion concerning the name of the Castle, while the change to "Gormenghast" lends weight to Drake's (see above, p.25).

⁹⁵ Elisabeth Gardaz, " 'The Reveries' in Titus Groan," The Mervyn Peake Review, No.3 (Autumn, 1976), 11-12.

⁹⁶ Bakhtin, Rabelais, p.9

⁹⁷ Binns suggests that "[a]s in a Shakespeare history play, Gormenghast is a kingdom legitimised by the forces of nature, and when Steerpike rebels he violates a mystical order that makes his doom inevitable" ("Situating Gormenghast," 27). There is some truth in this suggestion, although it does not take into account that one of the reasons for the ease with which Steerpike violates the world of the Castle is that the kingdom is threatened by decay and the dissolution of its community precisely because of its failure fully to integrate the dynamic forces of nature into its inmost being.

The phrases "apotheosis" and "entering into Paradise" are used by Northrop Frye to characterize the "summer" phase of "comedy, pastoral and idyll" in "The Archetypes of Literature" in Vickery, p.94. With some inconsistency, he applies the season of summer to romance in Anatomy.

- 98 Colin Greenland, "The Smashing of the Central Vase," The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 4 (Spring, 1977), 27.
- 99 Cassirer, An Essay on Man, pp.224-225.
- 100 Little, "Gogol's Town of NN." 16.
- 101 Victor Hugo, Préface de Cromwell (1827; rpt. Paris: Societe Francaise d'Imprimerie et de Librairie, 1897), pp.207-208.
- 102 Bakhtin, Rabelais, p.24.
- 103 Bakhtin, Rabelais, p.29.
- 104 Bakhtin, Rabelais, p.52.
- 105 G.K. Chesterton, Charles Dickens (London: Methuen, 1906), p.186.
- 106 Chesterton, Dickens, pp.194-195.
- 107 John Ruskin, The Stones of Venice, III, ch.3 (Three Volumes, 1851-1853; rpt. London: George Allen, 1904), p.169.
- 108 G. Wilson Knight, "King Lear and the Comedy of the Grotesque," in The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy, with three new essays (1930; rpt. London: Methuen, paperback, 1961), p.161.
- 109 Knight, "Lear," p. 175.
- 110 Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (1957; ed. New York: McGraw-Hill paperback, 1966), p.37.
- 111 Kayser, The Grotesque, p.187.
- 112 Kayser, The Grotesque, p.188.
- 113 Walter Sorell, The Other Face: The Mask in the Arts (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), p.10.
- 114 Kayser, The Grotesque, p.118.
- 115 Thomson, The Grotesque, p.27.
- 116 Charles Dickens, David Copperfield, introd. Norman Collins (1850; ed. London: Collins, 1952), p.773.
- 117 Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard (1961; ed. London: Tavistock, 1967), p.25.
- 118 Lilian Feder, Madness in Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.11.
- 119 Feder comments that the Dionysiac initiate is "at once a devouring animal, a reverent worshiper, and finally a god, as he merges through ritual violence with the feared and adored Dionysus" (Madness in Literature, p.49).
- 120 D.H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature,

(1924; rpt. London: Heineman, 1964):

In the first place Adam knew Eve as a wild animal knows its mate, momentarily, but vitally, in blood-knowledge. Blood-knowledge, not mind-knowledge. (p.79)

Blood-consciousness overwhelms, obliterates, and annuls mind-consciousness.

Mind-consciousness extinguishes blood-consciousness, and consumes the blood.

We are all of us conscious in both ways. And the two ways are antagonistic in us.

They will remain so.

That is our cross.

(p.80).

¹²¹ The phrase comes from TA, p.19, and was also used by Maeve Gilmore for the title of her biography of Peake. It is ironic that in Titus Alone, it is used in a passage dealing with deception.

¹²² Bakhtin, Rabelais, p.21

¹²³ TG, p.425.

¹²⁴ See GG, p.261.

¹²⁵ Michael Irwin, Picturing, p.22.

¹²⁶ MacAndrew, interpreting the grotesque in bleaker modernist terms, comments that "[t]he staring figures of the grotesque, contorted into frozen movement, which only reluctantly yield up meaning, are particularly suited to the embodiment of meaninglessness" (The Gothic Tradition, p.244.)

¹²⁷ See TG, p.39: ". . . the chef, like a galleon, lurched in his anchorage. The great ship's canvas sagged and crumpled and then suddenly an enormousness foundered and sank. There was a sound of something spreading as an area of seven flagstones became hidden from view beneath a catalytic mass of wine-drenched blubber."

¹²⁸ According to Jacques Favier in an article entitled "Distortions of Space and Time in the Titus Trilogy: a first approach to Mervyn Peake's Teratological Imagination" The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 8 (Spring, 1979), "the monstrous in Peake's work proceeds almost exclusively by means of hypertrophy;" (8).

¹²⁹ Henri Bergson, Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1911), p.26.

¹³⁰ In this connection one might also note the effeminate qualities in Prunesquallor and the terms of endearment with which Swelter addresses

the kitchen boys. In the absence of caritas or agape, eros, left to itself, explores the less divine labyrinths of pleasure.

¹³¹ See Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.83.

¹³² It is interesting to note the analogies between Steerpike and the image of the clown described by Joseph Campbell in The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology (1959; rpt. London: Souvenir Press, 1973):

. . . in practically every primitive society ever studied, the smearing of paint and clay on the body is thought to give magical protection as well as beauty; . . . in India, where cowdung is revered as sacred and the ritual distinction between the left hand (used at the toilet) and the right (putting food into the mouth) is an issue of capital moment, a ritual smearing of the forehead and body with coloured clays and ash is a prominently developed religious exercise; . . . among many advanced as well as primitive peoples the sacred clowns -- who in religious ceremonies are permitted to break taboos and always enact obscene pantomimes -- are initiated into their orders by way of a ritual eating of filth. . . . In our own circuses the clown is garishly painted, breaks whatever taboos the police permit, and is a great favourite of the youngsters, who perhaps see reflected in his peculiar charm the paradise of innocence that was theirs before they were taught the knowledge of good and evil, purity and filth. (pp.72-73)

Steerpike undergoes many of the experiences of the clown mentioned above, but in many ways he is a parody: he is far from amoral, for instance, and far from childhood innocence.

¹³³ See TG, pp.178 and 399.

¹³⁴ Enid Welsford, writing on The Fool: His Social and Literary History (London: Faber and Faber, 1935) notes that the qualities which remain constant in the image of the Harlequin are "agility, resilience and, as a rule, complete absence of the moral sense" (p.299). Steerpike is immoral and closer to Pulcinella, who is marked by "cynicism, cruelty and [the] power of turning the tables on his would-be oppressors" (p.301).

¹³⁵ G. Peter Winnington writing on "Fuchsia and Steerpike: Mood and Form." The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 5 (Autumn, 1977), 20, also notes the prolepsis of this and many other scenes between the two characters.

¹³⁶ G.K. Chesterton, quoted in The Cartoon Connection: The Art of Pictorial Humour, as seen by William Hewison (London: Elm Tree Books, 1977), p.138.

- ¹³⁷ Favier, "Distortions," 11.
- ¹³⁸ Arthur Koestler, The Act of Creation (1964; rpt. London: Picador, 1975), p.70.
- ¹³⁹ Favier, "Distortions," 12
- ¹⁴⁰ F.E. Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1891 (London: Macmillan, 1928), p.279.
- ¹⁴¹ Chesterton, Dickens, p.195.

Chapter Three : Gormenghast

¹ The words, "lost in a familiar realm" are from Peake's love poem to his wife, "For Maeve," (Peake's Progress, p.565). Addressed to the woman who is home to him, it offers a useful analogy for Titus's feeling of being at once part of and foreign to the Castle. The lines of poetry are from Peake's play, The Wit to Woo (Peake's Progress, p.294).

² Watney, Mervyn Peake, p.41.

³ Watney, Mervyn Peake, pp.104-105.

⁴ This appropriation of Northrop Frye's terms is not as cavalier as it may appear. He describes myth as "in the common sense. . . a story about a god" (Anatomy, p.33). Gormenghast Castle is clearly the god of the novels, inspiring both love and rebellion, awe at its magnificence and anger at its "Ten Commandments."

⁵ Eliade, Eternal Return, chs. 1 and 2.

⁶ See Frye, Anatomy: "The essential element of plot in romance is adventure, which means that romance is naturally a sequential and processional form, hence we know it better from fiction than from drama" (p.186), and the "major adventure, the element that gives literary form to the romance" is the "quest" (p.187). It is interesting to note the importance of the theatrical metaphor in Gormenghast, from the first invocation to the characters, "Let them appear" (p.8) to the "firelit stage of water" (p.465) and the yellow light that flares and makes it seem "as though a curtain had gone up and the drama had begun" (p.470), at the end of the novel. The combination of sequential action and the set dramatic piece creates similar problems for the adventure story that the detailed "megatext" creates for fantasy. Paul Zweig has commented on this in

The Adventurer (London: Dent, 1974):

The adventure story, which Merimee, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Kipling had trimmed to a swift, buoyant genre, became slow and atmospheric; action swam in an elaboration of imagery and extreme emotions which became the architecture of a highly literary genre. The complex resources of style were devoted to myth-building of a new sort. Now, the magnifications of myth lay not in the framework of great exploits, but in the interior rhythm which the adventurer imposed upon the world of his experience. Instead of epic clarity, we had baroque developments of language. Instead of narrative swiftness, we had Gothic amplifications of atmosphere, a mythicization not of events but of sensibility. The classic adventure stories of this new genre present an unexpected anomaly: they tell tales of splendid courage and exotic actions in a style which secretes complexity and slowness, until the actions recede and become a background for the elaborate frescos of style. (pp.227-228)

Zweig's analysis is clearly applicable to Gormenghast.

⁷ Walter L. Reed, Meditations on the Hero: A Study of the Romantic Hero in Nineteenth Century Fiction (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p.30.

⁸ Reed, Meditations, p.31.

⁹ Servotte, "Guide for Gormenghast," 6.

¹⁰ Philip Wheelright, "Notes on Mythopoeia," in Vickery, pp.63-64.

¹¹ C. G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959):

"The goal of the individuation process is the synthesis of the self" (p.164).

¹² Barthes, Mythologies (page references included in the text).

¹³ Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short have analysed the opening paragraphs of Gormenghast (extract from Style in Fiction in The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 15, Autumn, 1982) in an attempt to show how the language conveys the sense that "Things are so because they are so" (35).

¹⁴ Like Rasselas, Titus experiences dissatisfaction partly because life is too safe, too ordered, too predictably secure. In the words of Imlac, "some desire is necessary to keep life in motion; and he whose real wants are supplied must admit those of fancy" (The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia, by Samuel Johnson, in Shorter Novels, Eighteenth Century), p.17.

¹⁵ Campbell, The Masks of God, pp.117-118.

¹⁶ Edith Kern, The Absolute Comic (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p.72.

¹⁷ For example, we are told that "[h]e was no mere watcher from the safety of his bed, when, in fierce and secret grapple, old scores were settled in deathly silence, while in his cubicle by the dormitory door, the formidable janitor slept like a crocodile upon his back" (pp.305-306). None of this is as fully realized as Titus's adventures as an individual.

¹⁸ Mervyn Peake, "The Artist's World," a talk in the series entitled "As I See It," recorded 29 April, 1947, in The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 8 (Spring, 1979), 4-5.

¹⁹ Jung, Archetypes, p.219,n.

²⁰ Frye, The Secular Scripture, pp.60-61.

²¹ George MacDonald, On The Miracles of Our Lord, (London: Strahan, 1870), p.251.

²² Mary Shelley, Introduction to Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus in Classic Horror Omnibus I, introd. Peter Haining (London: Book Club Associates, 1979), p.19.

²³ Rollo May, Love and Will (New York, 1969; rpt. Glasgow: Collins, 1977), p.324.

²⁴ Jung, Archetypes, p.171.

²⁵ Zweig, The Adventurer, p.70

²⁶ Zweig, The Adventurer, pp.70-71.

²⁷ The interrelationship of death, fantasy and creativity in Keats's poem, is clearly central to much of Peake's work, and emphasises his imaginative links with the Romantics. The quotation is from Ode To a Nightingale, in John Keats: The Complete Poems, ed. John Barnard (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 1.70.

²⁸ See Fiedler, Love and Death:

Stripped of incidental ornaments, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn are seen as the same dream dreamed twice over, the second time as nightmare. . . . In both, there is an escape to an island. . . . But in the one case the natural Eden is purely a boys' paradise, from which one returns home as from a picnic; in the other, it is a temporary asylum not only from 'sivilization' but from pursuit, enslavement, and death; and leaving it, the refugee plunges into further flight. (p.261)

One may compare the forest in Gormenghast with the Under-River in Titus Alone.

²⁹ Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native, introd. Derwent May (1878; ed. London: Macmillan, 1974).

Eustacia's relationship to the Heath also partakes of an ambivalence, similar to that experienced by Titus. As "Queen of the Night," she is the human incarnation of the sombre splendour of Egdon. As Eustacia Vye, she yearns for Parisian boulevards.

³⁰ F.E. Hardy, The Early Life, p.150.

³¹ Mervyn Peake, "With People, So with Trees," in Peake's Progress, p.255.

³² S.T. Coleridge, "Kubla Khan" in Malan, ll.12-16.

³³ Hardy, The Return of the Native, p.204.

³⁴ In many ways this is what Philip Wheelright calls the "primitive ritual, of which the drama of the death and rebirth of the vegetation god is a particular though very basic exemplification" ("Notes on Mythopoeia," p.64).

³⁵ The symbolism of the coat is noted by Bruce Hunt in an article entitled "Gormenghast: Psychology of the Bildungsroman" in The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 6 (Spring 1978), 14. As he has also used Jung's ideas in interpreting this passage, there are points of correlation between his reading and mine.

³⁶ The lines are from Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill," in Dylan Thomas: Selected Works (London: Book Club Associates, 1976), p.113, ll. 12 and 33.

³⁷ According to Jung, "[w]ater is the commonest symbol for the unconscious" (Archetypes, p.18).

³⁸ MacAndrew, The Gothic Tradition, p.60.

³⁹ MacAndrew, The Gothic Tradition, p.60

⁴⁰ Jung, Archetypes, p.28.

⁴¹ Jung, Archetypes, p.30.

⁴² Jung, Archetypes, p.12.

⁴³ Jung, Archetypes: "The nixie is an even more instinctive version of a magical feminine being whom I call the anima. She can also be a siren, melusina (mermaid), wood-nymph, Grace, or Erlking's daughter, or a lamia or succubus, who infatuates young men and sucks the life out of them" (p.25). In enticing Titus away from his home, the Thing does suck one aspect of his life from him, an aspect which he then only develops a full understanding of as a result of separation, in Titus Alone.

⁴⁴ See Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill," l.7.

⁴⁵ See above, p.19. Even in Titus's experience of "joyous metamorphosis," however, there is an undercurrent of fear, a sense that merging with the world can emphasise the precariousness of one's existence.

⁴⁶ The phrases are, once more, from Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," ll.37 and 54. There is an interesting parallel, too, between Titus's experience of both the exhilaration and the awesomeness of the natural world and Wordsworth's evocation of the mountain and the silent lake experienced first as source of "troubled pleasure," where the "craggy ridge" seems like "an elfin pinnace." The atmosphere changes as the boy feels the threat of the mountain's strangeness, and in terror he returns to the shore of the lake:

but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams. (ll.390-400)

The lines are from "The Prelude, Book I," in Wordsworth: Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest de Selincourt (1936; rpt. London: Oxford University Press Paperback, 1969).

⁴⁷ Huizinga, Homo Ludens, p.7.

⁴⁸ One may note the parallel between the dead tree and the dead Castle which becomes a haven as the novel proceeds.

⁴⁹ Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. Kenneth Muir (1964; rpt. London: Arden Edition, Methuen, 1972), III, iv, ll. 105-106.

⁵⁰ The silver bracelet in the raven's mouth is an appealing visual fancy. Whether one should succumb to the temptation to read symbolism into it is a moot point. It does suggest, however, some precious gift, like the Doctor's gift of the ruby to Fuchsia, that leads to a community of spirit, in this case Titus's safe return to his family.

⁵¹ The living death that Titus experiences while the Poet reads is also a comment on the way in which the Castle, at the official level, has annihilated the living power of art.

⁵²" . . . there was the Countess herself, the only character for whom he held a puzzled and grudging respect -- not for her intelligence, but for the reason of the very fact that she baffled his analysis. What was she? What was she thinking and by what processes? His mind and hers had no point of contact. In her presence he was doubly careful. They were animals of a different species. They watched one another with the mutual suspicion of those who have no common tongue" (p.349).

⁵³ Wordsworth, "Ode On Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood," in Poetical Works, 11.181-182.

⁵⁴ Hunt, "Gormenghast: Psychology of the Bildungsroman," 13. For the sake of brevity, Hunt simplifies rather ruthlessly, and makes the contrast between Castle and Mountain far too easy.

⁵⁵ This is how Fuchsia responds to Steerpike at the burial: "Fuchsia involuntarily made a little gesture with her hand, a motion of recognition, of friendliness, but there was about the gesture something so subtle, so tender, as to be indescribable. For herself, she did not know that her hand had moved -- she only knew that the figure across the grave was young" (TG,p.339).

⁵⁶ The image of the bandage that blinds recalls the image of the bandage being unwound as Steerpike climbs across the roofs of Gormenghast (TG,p.133). Abuse of that light leads to darkness, madness, death, and counterpoints the continuing illumination experienced by Titus.

⁵⁷ Manlove also emphasises this passage, pointing out that "[i]t is Barquentine's selfless loyalty that makes him, even while he is burning after having been set alight by Steerpike, leap on his assailant and clutch him frenziedly, in the hope that he will die with him" (Modern Fantasy, p.242).

⁵⁸ The image of the warlock's wand is also central to a poem of Peake's dealing with the process of artistic creation:

The paper is breathless
Under the hand
And the pencil is poised
Like a warlock's wand
But the white page darkens
And is blown on the wind
And the voice of a pencil
Who can find?

Introduction to
'Drawings by Mervyn Peake.'
(in Peake's Progress, p.237)

The warlock's wand suggests a process of magical transformation as does the other image that plays so central a role in Peake's work, the mask, which can change, be detached or graft itself onto the character, indelibly.

⁵⁹ George MacDonald, Phantastes and Lilith, introd. C.S. Lewis (1858, 1895; rpt. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), p.94.

⁶⁰ Huizinga, Homo Ludens, p.26

⁶¹ Eliot, "Burnt Norton," Four Quartets, I, 1.11 and V, 11.33-39.

⁶² See David Lodge's article on "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy" in Modernism, 1890-1930, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James Mc Farlane (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), pp. 481-496.

⁶³ In the event it is Prunesquallor, the lover of Non-sense, who clowns for Fuchsia in a spirit of love (pp. 189-190) who comes closest to being the hero-clown.

⁶⁴ Fiedler, Love and Death, p.125.

⁶⁵ Batchelor has discussed the Thing in terms of the influence on Peake of W.H. Hudson's Green Mansions. According to him, Rima was the direct source for the Thing, but where the characterization of Rima is consistent and the conflict lies in the different perceptions of her provided by the Indians and Abel, Peake "simply changes his mind" about her and turns her into "a false goddess who deserves death by thunderbolt, although this is also a pathetic, and therefore morally exalting death" (Mervyn Peake, p.99). There is certainly a remarkable parallel between Abel's discovery of Rima in the enchanted forest and Titus's discovery of the Thing. Also, both creatures speak to the birds, both are tiny, both seem made of some ephemeral substance. But Peake's Thing is just as much an intrinsic part of the natural world, with her cruelty and her crudity as Rima is with her gentleness. Cristiano Rafanelli has also commented on the "double aspect" of the Thing, in an article entitled "Titus and the Thing in Gormenghast," The Mervyn Peake Review, No.3 (Autumn, 1976), 15-20.

⁶⁶ Manlove, Modern Fantasy, pp. 230 ff.

⁶⁷ Peter McKenzie, "Manlove on Fantasy: Theories and their Consequences," The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 11 (Autumn, 1980), 21.

⁶⁸ Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents, trans. Joan

Riviere (1930; ed. London: Hogarth, 1939): "The substitution of the power of a united number for the power of a single man is the decisive step towards civilization. The essence of it lies in the circumstance that the members of the community have restricted their possibilities of gratification, whereas the individual recognized no such restrictions" (p.59).

⁶⁹ Steerpike becomes, ironically, the scapegoat as the whole Castle is geared towards killing him. Insofar as he represents all that is evil, he is Satan and the Shadow, not only of Titus, but of Gormenghast. All "sin" is projected on him, and, in killing him, the Castle is restored to innocence. Because he is evil, the villain, he is a curious inversion of the archetypal saviour, who is innocent. He is also the clown as anti-hero, the simia dei (hence the appropriateness of his pet monkey), to whom Jung refers in Archetypes, when writing of "the alchemical figure of Mercurius," with whom Steerpike has much in common: "A curious combination of typical trickster motifs can be found in the alchemical figure of Mercurius; for instance, his fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks, his powers as a shape-shifter, his dual nature, half animal, half divine, his exposure to all kinds of tortures and -- last but not least -- his approximation to the figure of a saviour" (p.255).

⁷⁰ The static quality of the Countess is very well captured, and ironically so, just before the Castle exerts itself. Perhaps it is not so ironic after all, for the exertion is in the service of the still world. Prunesquallor watches the Countess at her window: ". . . he saw the deep copper-beech colour of her hair against the pearl-grey tower-tops that floated in the distance. And the blackness of her dress, and the marble of her neck and the sheen of the glass, and the pollen-like softness of the sky and towers so jaggedly circumscribed. She was a monument against a broken window and beyond the broken window her realm, tremulous and impalpable in the white mist" (pp.387-388).

⁷¹ Frye, Anatomy, p.186.

⁷² Frye, Anatomy: "The first phase is the myth of the birth of the hero. . ." (p.198). "The second phase brings us to the innocent youth of the hero" and one notes the "theme of the sexual

barrier" (pp.199-200). "The third phase is the. . . quest theme" and the fourth phase has as its central theme "the maintaining of the integrity of the innocent world against the assault of experience" (pp.200-201). In the fourth phase we also find that "the happier society is more or less visible throughout the action instead of emerging only in the last few moments" (p.200). Gormenghast as the happier society is to recede into the inner, invisible world of Titus's mind in the final novel, while the fourth and fifth phases ("contemplative withdrawal" and the "penseroso" phase, p.202) are never fully experienced by the hero but seem to be reserved for the god, who now experiences a "sequel to action rather than a youthful preparation for it" (p.202), as the Poet contemplates the mysteries of his world, mirroring "[a] central image of this phase, a favorite of Yeats, . . . that of the old man in the tower, the lonely hermit absorbed in occult or magical studies" (p.202). Of course, the Poet is not, strictly speaking, a hermit, but the mood surrounding him and the Castle seems to be aptly described by this last phase.

Interlude : Boy in Darkness

¹ Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.132.

² Favier talks about this juxtaposition in terms of scandal: "At the outset, strangeness and distance from the norm give birth to what we could call 'scandal.' The sense of scandal is felt all the more acutely when the monstrous object is juxtaposed with the normal object, for it is far less easily assimilated" ("Distortions," 8). . . The Titus books reveal "the permanent scandal of the juxtaposition of the familiar and the strange in the same object" (8).

³ Kon Ichikawa, dir., Fires On The Plain, Daiei, 1959

⁴ Compare the use of yellow here with its use in Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor, with its gentle loving Yellow Creature. On the other hand, yellow is associated with "a treeless desert" when Titus contemplates the marble in Gormenghast (p.86).

⁵ Dali, in The History of Surrealism, p.336.

⁶ Ronald Binns, "The Meaning of Boy in Darkness," The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 14 (Spring, 1982), 7-8.

⁷ Herman Melville, Moby Dick, ed. Harold Beaver (1851; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), ch.42.

⁸ 'Who cares for you?' said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'

At this the whole pack rose up into the air, and came flying down upon her: she gave a little scream, half of fright and half of anger, and tried to beat them off, and found herself lying on the bank, with her head in the lap of her sister, who was gently brushing away some dead leaves that had fluttered down from the trees upon her face.

Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland, p.98.

⁹ Binns, "Boy in Darkness," 10.

¹⁰ Binns, "Boy in Darkness": "the echo of Keats ('and no birds sang') seems wholly ironic" (4).

¹¹ Frye, The Secular Scripture, p.61.

Chapter Four : Titus Alone

¹ The words "Grottoed no longer" appear in a poem Peake wrote in response to his baby son (1.28). It deals with the danger and the wonder of the child apart from its mother's womb, no longer safe, but only now an individual:

Gulp at the white tides of the globe, and scream
'I am!' O little island, sleep or wake,
What though the darkening gusts divide your mother's
Rich continent
For all you are, yet there's a sacrament
Of more than marl shall make you one another's.

(Peake's Progress, 11.31-36).

Titus will finally discover the truth of this sacrament when he is "Grottoed no longer."

² Campbell, "Bios and Mythos," p.22.

³ Philip Rahv, "The Myth and the Powerhouse," in Vickery, p.118.

⁴ Rahv, "The Myth and the Powerhouse," pp. 110-111.

⁵ Charles Chaplin, dir., Modern Times, United Artists, 1936.

Fritz Lang, dir., Metropolis, UFA, 1927.

⁶ Michel Zeraffa, Fictions: The Novel and Social Reality, trans. Catherine Burns and Tom Burns (1971; ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p.124. The quotation is from the preface to the French translation of A.Döblin's novel, Die drei Sprünge des Wang-Lun.

- ⁷ Huizinga, Homo Ludens, p.192.
- ⁸ Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p.29.
- ⁹ Zweig, The Adventurer, pp.40-41.
- ¹⁰ Georg Lukács, The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature, trans. Anna Bostock (1920; ed. Cambridge, Mass.: M I T Press, Paperback, 1973), p.30.
- ¹¹ R.F. Brissenden, Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade (London: Macmillan, 1974), p.77.
- ¹² Brissenden, Virtue in Distress, p.129.
- ¹³ Frye sees Christ as the archetype of the "incongruously ironic" (Anatomy, p.42), and, as a redeeming hero, Titus is often implicitly linked with Christ. In Boy in Darkness, Goat says to Titus, "You are what we have been waiting for so long" (p.193) and in Titus Alone, we find this scene between the Under-River disciples and Titus:

'And have you been searching for me for a long while?'
'We have.'
'For what reason?'
'Because you need us. You see. . . we believe you to be what you say you are.'
'What do you say I am?'
The three took a simultaneous step forward. They lifted their rugged faces to the leaves above them and spoke together. . .
'You are Titus, the Seventy-Seventh Earl of Groan, and Lord of Gormenghast. So help us God.' (p.187)
- ¹⁴ Eliot, "The Hollow Men," in Collected Poems, ll.11-12.
- ¹⁵ Bob Dylan, "Ballad of a Thin Man," in Writings and Drawings (London: Granada, 1974), p.307, ll.23-33.
- ¹⁶ Patrick Parrinder, Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching (New York: Methuen, 1980), p.93.
- ¹⁷ Clifford, Allegory, p.116.
- ¹⁸ Eliot, "The Burial of the Dead," The Waste Land, l.22.
- ¹⁹ Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition (New York: Doubleday, 1957), p.13.
- ²⁰ George Lucas, prod., The Return of the Jedi, 1983.
- ²¹ "The Terror of History" is the title of Eliade's final chapter in The Myth of the Eternal Return.

²² Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin, Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.7.

²³ Scholes and Rabkin, Science Fiction, p.27.

²⁴ Frank Herbert, "Science Fiction and a World in Crisis" in Science Fiction, Today and Tomorrow, ed. Reginald Bretnor (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 75-76.

²⁵ Parrinder, Science Fiction, p.77.

²⁶ Jackson, Fantasy: "Paraxis is a telling notion in relation to the place, or space, of the fantastic, for it implies an inextricable link to the main body of the 'real' which it shades and threatens" (p.19). The notion of paraxis need not be confined to terms like "shade" and "threaten," though, as the outworking of the paraxial vision may be creative illumination of the real.

²⁷ Robert Heinlein, quoted in The Science Fiction Book, An Illustrated History, by Franz Rottensteiner (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), p.14.

²⁸ There are 122 chapters in 262 pages in Titus Alone, compared with 69 in 505 pages and 80 in 511 pages in Titus Groan and Gormenghast, respectively.

²⁹ Frye, The Secular Scripture, p.134.

³⁰ Zweig, The Adventurer, p.63.

³¹ Zweig, The Adventurer, p.61

³² The Lamb, whose "experiments were without precedent" (Boy in Darkness, p.207) perverts the image of innocence just as Cheeta's viginity travesties the image of chastity, and both suggest the sterility that is the result of their self-absorption.

³³ See above, p.256, and GG., p.242.

³⁴ Bakhtin, Rabelais, pp. 42 and 38.

³⁵ The shadowing of Titus is similar to the nameless threat that hangs over Kafka's heroes. They also represent the world of "men without chests" into which Titus has fallen. According to C.S. Lewis, "[t]he Chest -- Magnanimity -- Sentiment -- these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal" (The Abolition of Man, 1943; rpt. Glasgow: Collins, 1978), p. 19. The tension which repression of the "chest" causes is seen in a later vision we have of the Helmets:

"Their faces showed no sign of excitement. Their bodies were as unhurried as ever. They had control of every muscle. But they could do nothing about the tell-tale hissing which argued so palpably the anger, the ferment and the pain that was twisted up inside them" (p.192).

³⁶ Mervyn Peake, "The Reader Takes Over," 12.

³⁷ Batchelor suggests that Muzzlehatch "is like Sancho Panza or Sam Weller, but he is also like Long John Silver" (Mervyn Peake, p.118).

³⁸ Eliot, "The Burial of the Dead," The Waste Land, 11.2-3.

³⁹ Frye, The Secular Scripture, p.157.

⁴⁰ André Dhôtel, Preface to Titus Errant, trans. Peter Stap, in The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 10 (Spring, 1980),28.

⁴¹ Gilbert Highet, The Anatomy of Satire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p.11

⁴² Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, Act IV, in Complete Works, p.374. (Act III in the conventional version).

⁴³ Foucault, Madness and Civilization, p.x.

⁴⁴ Peter McKenzie, "Mervyn Peake: Sketch for an Overview," The Mervyn Peake Review, No. 6 (Spring, 1978),5.

⁴⁵ Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in Collected Poems, 11. 13-14.

⁴⁶ Jung, Archetypes, p. 92.

⁴⁷ See, for example, The Cannibal by John Hawkes (London: Neville Spearman, 1962):

The town, roosting on charred earth, no longer ancient, the legs and head lopped from its only horse statue, gorged itself on straggling beggars and remained gaunt beneath an evil cloaked moon. . . . As the old families returned to scrub again on the banks of the canal or walk singly dressed in black, the prisoners filed out over the hills, either as names on a ticket, or if the ticket had been lost, simply as uncounted numbers. . . . The town, without its walls and barricades, though still a camp-site of a thousand years, was as shrivelled in structure and as decomposed as an oxen's tongue black with ants. (p.24)

⁴⁸ Gilmore, A World Away, p.57.

⁴⁹ Gilmore, A World Away, p.58.

⁵⁰ Batchelor notes that in Peake's notes "it is clear that for Titus the visit to the Under-River was to have been like a visit

to hell with Titus as the leader of a gang of beggars who, tormenting him with mockeries of Gormenghast Castle, anticipate the travesty of Gormenghast presented at Cheeta's party in the Black House at the end of the novel. . . . It is not at all surprising that Peake did not sustain this stance of total rejection: he is too good-tempered for that, and becomes mercifully interested in his characters as he creates them. . ." (Mervyn Peake, pp.117-118). The important point is that he becomes interested, sympathetically, in the Under-River and not in Cheeta's friends.

⁵¹ Conrad, The Victorian Treasure-House, pp. 166-167.

⁵² Conrad, The Victorian Treasure-House, p.167.

⁵³ Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel, ch. 3. This suggests that the movement from the expansiveness of Titus Groan and Gormenghast to the fractured quality of Titus Alone is a movement from the epic to the novel: "The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality" (p.56). This vision of the novel runs counter to that suggested by Peake, who sees it as a "pantehnicon" and who was himself deeply concerned with the "totality of life." Nevertheless, Lukacs suggests an interesting tension between the mind that yearns for totality and the modern age that blocks it.

⁵⁴ Jackson, Fantasy, p.132.

⁵⁵ Binns sees Conrad's novel as an influence on Boy in Darkness ("The Meaning of Boy in Darkness," 4). There seem to be similar parallels between Conrad's novel and Titus Alone, although the locality is conceived in specifically Anglo-Saxon terms, the heart of darkness contained within rituals recognizable to us, as opposed to the use of Africa as a metaphor for this seething underside of human experience, in Heart of Darkness.

⁵⁶ This image of thousands of faces staring out of windows appears again in Gormenghast (p. 477) and in a letter to Maeve, describing Germany after the war: "Nearly every window had a head which stared at the opposite wall of the street as one came abreast. Sometimes looking quickly one would see a face staring at one from between the blinds, which would immediately shift its

gaze on its being met (Gilmore, A World Away, p.58). The heads that haunt **are also** central to poems like "Heads Float About Me" and, certainly in Titus Alone, they become a sign that the whole world has gone mad.

⁵⁷ Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.120

⁵⁸ McKenzie, "Sketch for an Overview," 8.

⁵⁹ Laurence Bristow-Smith suggests that throughout Titus Alone, we see Titus trying "to draw strength, or to gain the respect of others, from the fact that he is an Earl, notably when he is talking to Muzzlehatch (TA,p.27, p.61) and when he is up before the magistrate (TA, p.85). There is obviously an inherent contradiction in this -- hypocrisy on the part of Titus -- for he is drawing strength from a title to which he no longer has any right, which he abdicated when he left Gormenghast." At the end of the novel, Titus rejects "this personal and hypocritical use of his hereditary position." However, to say that Titus ("There he stood: Titus Groan" p.263), has now rejected "any form of dependence, physical or mental, upon the castle" is to ignore the vital re-assimilation of the castle in a form that Titus can carry with him wherever he goes, fulfilling the prophecies of both Juno and Gertrude; Gormenghast (the mother) will always be with him, he will always come back to Gormenghast, that is, find the meaning of his existence in the truth of that world. (Bristow-Smith's article is called "A Critical Conclusion: The End of Titus Alone," The Mervyn Peake Review, No.12, Spring, 1981, see p. 13).

⁶⁰ Jung, Archetypes, p.96.

⁶¹ Quoted in Kern, The Absolute Comic, p.207.

⁶² Frye, The Secular Scripture, p. 174

⁶³ Frye, The Secular Scripture, p.61.

⁶⁴ Charles Dickens, Hard Times, ed. David Craig (1854; ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.47.

⁶⁵ Mervyn Peake, The Craft of the Lead Pencil, in Gilmore and Johnson, Writings and Drawings, p.60.

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THE POEMS

The following poems appear in Peake's Progress:

"Sing I the Fickle, Fit-for-Nothing Fellows," "The Cocky Walkers," "Palais de Danse," "May 1940," "Fort Darland," "The Consumptive. Belsen, 1945," "Coloured Money," "Out of the overlapping," "In the Fabric of this Love," "An Ugly Crow Sits Hunched on Jackson's Heart."

The following poems appear in A Book of Nonsense:

"Little Spider, " "O Little Fly," "An Old and Crumbling Parapet," "O'er Seas That Have no Beaches," "'Come Break the News to Me, Sweet Horse,'" "I Cannot Give the Reasons," "O Here It Is! And There It Is!" "Lean Sideways on the Wind," "Tintinnabulum," "The Men in Bowler Hats Are Sweet," "Shrink, Shrink," "Aunts and Uncles," "The Threads Remain."

The following poems appear in Selected Poems:

"Satan," "Victoria Station, 6.58 p.m.," "Coarse as the Sun is Blatant," "Victims," "That Lance of Light," "Conceit," "And I Thought You Beside Me," "Heads Float About Me," "London 1941," "The Spadesmen," "The Time Has Come For More than Small Decisions," "Is There no Love can Link Us?" "El Greco," "Thunder the Christ of It," "As a Great Town Draws Eccentrics In," "When Tiger-men Sat their Mercurial Coursers," "At Times of Half-light," "No Difference," "Robert Frost," "To Maeve."

"If I could See, Not Surfaces" is printed in Mervyn Peake, Writings and Drawings, ed. Maeve Gilmore and Shelagh Johnson.

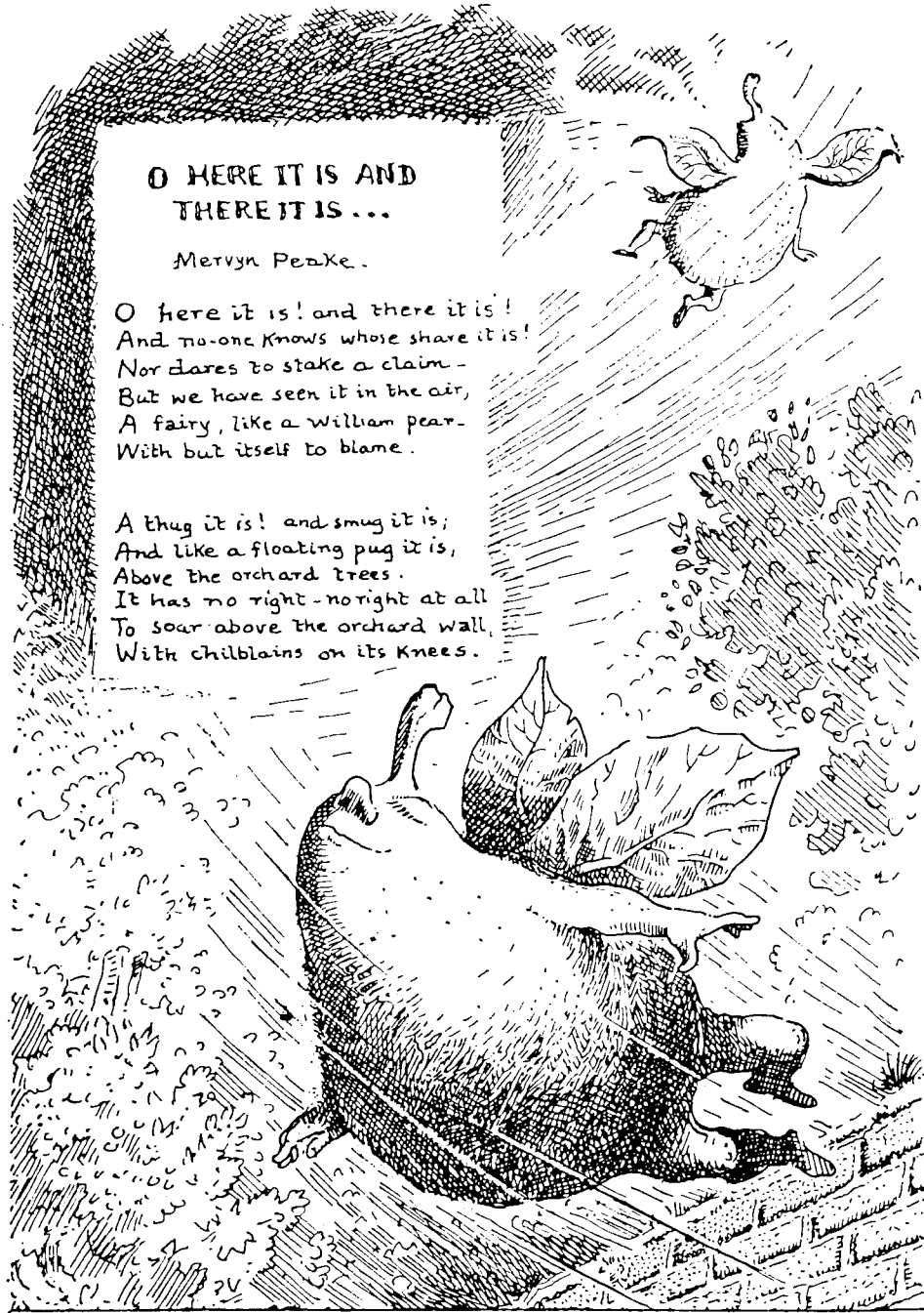
Further details may be found in the section Works Consulted.

O HERE IT IS AND
THERE IT IS ...

Mervyn Peake.

O here it is! and there it is!
And no-one knows whose share it is!
Nor dares to stake a claim -
But we have seen it in the air,
A fairy, like a William pear -
With but itself to blame.

A thug it is! and smug it is;
And like a floating pug it is,
Above the orchard trees.
It has no right - no right at all
To soar above the orchard wall
With chilblains on its knees.



COLOURED MONEY

- I am too rich already, for my eyes
 Mint gold, while my heart cries
 'O cease!
 Is there no rest from richness, and no peace
 5 For me again?'
 For gold is pain,
 And the edged coins can smart,
 And beauty's metal weighs upon the heart.
- How can I spend this coinage when it floods
 10 So ceaselessly between the lids,
 And gluts my vaults with bright
 Shillings of sharp delight
 Whose every penny
 Is coloured money?
- 15 Storm, harvest, flood or snow,
 Over the generous country as I go
 And gather helplessly,
 New wealth from all I see
 In every spendthrift thing --
 20 O then I long to spring
 Through the charged air, a wastrel, with not one
 Farthing to weigh me down,
 But hollow! foot to crown
 To prance immune among vast alchemies,
 25 To prance! and laugh! my heart and throat and eyes
 Emptied of all
 Their golden gall.

IF I COULD SEE, NOT SURFACES

If I could see, not surfaces,
 But could express
 What lies beneath the skin
 Where the blood moves
 5 In fruit or head or stone,
 Then would I know the one
 Essential
 And my eyes
 When dead
 10 Would give the worm
 No hollow food.

If I could hear
 Beyond the noise of things
 Those Happenings
 15 That stir the seed of sound,
 And know the springs
 Of Eden flood the round
 Chasms of my twin shells, and beat
 Old water-hammers on the hidden drums,
 20 Then would I know my music wells
 From the hot earth, and comes
 Astride the long-sea-organ
 Of man's ocean.

If I could feel
 25 Beyond each slender
 Movement of her head, that trails
 A track of earthless clay
 Through gloom,
 The rhythm titanic
 30 Whence the tender
 Gesture drifted, like a feather
 Fallen from the downy throat
 Of some winged mother,
 Desolately, to fail and flutter,
 35 Falter, and die
 In the rented room --
 Then would I plunder splendour
 At the womb.

If I could feel
40 My words of wax were struck
By the rare seal
Of crested truth,
Then would I give bold birth
To long
45 Rivers of song.

Where is that inexhaustible,
That secret genesis
Of Sound and Sight?
It is too close for me,
50 It lies
Unexcavated by these eyes
In the lost archives of my heart.

CONCEIT

I heard a winter tree in song
 Its leaves were birds, a hundred strong;
 when all at once it ceased to sing,
 For every leaf had taken wing.

THAT LANCE OF LIGHT

That lance of light that slid across the dark
 To disappear a moment later, when
 A cloud like a great haystack with its angry
 Hair awry devoured it and then spat
 5 It out like the barbed war-head of a lyric,
 Sang earthward, and a million light-years later
 Pierced the green dark of a tall weed-hung vessel,
 And in a cup of honey-coloured light
 Hissed at the impact.

ROBERT FROST

The great tree creaked and splinters of sharp ice
 Broke from the frozen branches in a shower;
 I thought of Robert Frost and of his power
 4 With simple words that he can so entice
 And wake
 To such a startling order; they can bring
 Fresh grass up wet against the heart and slake
 My English dust with his New England spring.

TO MAEVE

You walk unaware
 Of the slender gazelle
 That moves as you move
 And is one with the limbs
 That you have.

You live unaware
 7 Of the faint, the unearthly
 Echo of hooves
 That within your white streams
 Of clear clay that I love

Are in flight as you turn,
 As you stand, as you move,
 As you sleep, for the slender
 Gazelle never rests
 In your ivory grove.

AND I THOUGHT YOU BESIDE ME

And I thought you beside me
 How rare and how desperate
 And your eyes were wet
 And your face as still
 5 As the body of a leveret
 On a tranced hill
 But my thought belied me
 And you were not there
 But only the trees that shook
 Only a storm that broke
 Through the dark air.

IN THE FABRIC OF THIS LOVE

In the fabric of this love
 I hoard for you are lions wove,
 Are eagles, and a dew-drenched lamb
 Shuddering in the dawn's first beam.

In my fabric England mourns
 And all I know that's lovely burns.
 Never turn the arras over
 Where the ghouls are, little lover!

SING I THE FICKLE, FIT-FOR-NOTHING

FELLOWS

- Sing I the fickle, fit-for-nothing fellows
 For I have known them and have heard the yell
 That rattles round the base of laughter's pail.
 The empty-pocket boys who ask no quarter,
 5 For whom no childhood sings, and no hereafter
 Rustles tremendous wings.
 Their hollow sail
 Fills with a fitful blast
 As down the sea
 10 They skid, without a needle or a star
 Their careless privateer,
 Agog for a gold island
 Or a war
 With penny pirates on a silver sand.
 15 Sing I the way they tilt the cocky hat,
 The lightning tongue that spins a cigarette
 Along a slit.
 The loveless eye
 Like a wet pebble through the tilted glass.
 20 I think their forebears gave the Spaniard trouble,
 And in the mêlée made a job of it
 With bloody cutlass.

THE COCKY WALKERS

Grouped nightly at the cold, accepted wall,
 Carved with a gaslight chisel the lean heads
 Cry out unwittingly for Rembrandt's needle.
 These are the flashy saplings whose domain
 5 I cannot enter.
 They burn at lip and finger the stuffed paper;
 The trouser-pocket boys, the cocky walkers.
 Sons of old mothers, with their hats askew,
 Hummock the shoulder to the little flower
 10 That lights the palm into a nightmare land,
 A bloody basin of the sterile moon,
 That lights the face that sprouts the cigarette
 Into a sudden passion of fierce colour.
 Down the cold corridor of winter nights
 15 I see a thousand groups that keep
 The fag alight, at walls, and in the sharp
 Stern corners of the street:
 These are the sprigs; flash boys, uncaught,
 Treading the reedy springboard of green days.
 20 Theirs is a headiness for they
 Have burned their lives up to the quarter-mark.
 The days move by them and the chill nights hold them
 In an old, unthought conspiracy for they
 Tinkle upon tin feet that send no root.
 25 I see them at the cold, accepted wall,
 The trouser-pocket boys, the cocky walkers.

PALAIS DE DANSE

Can you not see within that small
 And callow head, a brightness far
 From this dance hall?
 Her evening-dress
 5 Is splitting like the chrysalis,
 And when she stirs
 A caterpillar moves.

Can you not see through her twin panes
 Of coloured glass
 10 That dusky room within
 Her house of powder'd clay?
 O stranger, stay,
 Do you not see
 A barbarous glory?

15 Observe her, one of that bright million
 Wherever the blood roars and the limbs sing:
 Unknown to her
 One foot is tap-tap-tapping on the floor:
 Her neck supports a brittle
 20 And thoughtless miracle
 Deadened with chalky pollen.
 A cigarette
 Like a white stamen with a burning anther
 Is drooping from the flower tropical
 25 That has two petals
 Of dead, wet scarlet.

The sons of swingtime with their feet tap-tapping
 The hollow platform wait the millionth moment
 When to let loose on us the tinsel tiger.
 30 Arise the fag-end boys from the tin-tables,
 And slide into the hollow of the rhythm.
 The crimson jazz is bouncing on the boards!

Where is she now?
 She glides,
 35 She comes
 With a small shiny man,
 And rides
 Into the marrow of the Congo drums.

WHEN TIGER-MEN SAT THEIR MERCURIAL COURSERS

When tiger-men sat their mercurial coursers,
 Hauled into shuddering arches the proud fibre
 Of head and throat, sank spurs, and trod on air -
 I was not there. . . .

When clamorous centaurs thundered to the rain-pools,
 6 Shattered with their fierce hooves the silent mirrors,
 When glittering drops clung to their beards and hair -
 I was not there. . . .

When through a blood-dark dawn a man with antlers
 Cried, and throughout the day the echoes suffered
 His agony and died in evening air -
 I was not there. . . .

VICTORIA STATION. 6.58p.m.

Sudden, beneath the pendant clock arose
 Out of the drab and artificial ground
 A horse with wings of scarlet, and pale flowers
 Glimmered upon his forehead, while around

His neck and mane like wreaths of incense streamed
 Young hosts of stars, and as his eyes burned proud,
 The men with black umbrellas stood and stared
 And nudged each other and then laughed aloud.

THE MEN IN BOWLER HATS ARE SWEET

The Men in Bowler Hats are sweet!
And dance through April showers,
So innocent! Oh, it's a treat
To watch their tiny little feet
Leap nimbly through the arduous wheat
6 Among the lambs and flowers.

Many and many is the time
That I have watched them play,
A broker drenched in glimmering rime,
A banker, innocent of crime
With lots of bears and bulls, in time
12 To share the holiday.

The grass is lush - the moss is plush,
The trees are hands at prayer.
The banker and the broker flush
To see a white rose in a bush,
And gasp with joy, and with a blush
18 They hug each bull and bear.

The Men in Bowler Hats are sweet
Beneath their bowler hats.
It's not their fault if, in the heat
Of their transactions, I repeat
It's not their fault if vampires meet
24 And gurgle in their spats.

LITTLE SPIDER

Little Spider
 spiding sadly
 in the webly
 light of leaves!
 Why deride a
 6 spide's mentadly
 when its hebly
 full of grieves?

Little spider
 legged and lonely
 in the bony
 way of thieves.
 Where's the fly-da
 on the phonebly?

O LITTLE FLY

O little fly! Delightful fly!
 Perch on my wrist again:
 Then rub your legs and dry your eye,
 And climb my fist again:

For surely here, the atmosphere
 Is somehow right and good for you
 I love you most when as your host
 I'm in the mood for you.

O'ER SEAS THAT HAVE NO BEACHES

O'er seas that have no beaches
 To end their waves upon,
 I floated with twelve peaches,
 A sofa and a swan.

The blunt waves crashed above us
 6 The sharp waves burst around,
 There was no one to love us,
 No hope of being found -

Where, on the notched horizon
 So endlessly a-drip,
 I saw all of a sudden
 No sign of any ship.

AN OLD AND CRUMBLING PARAPET

An old and crumbling parapet
 Arose out of the dancing sea -
 And on its top there sat a flea
 For reasons which I quite forget,
 5 But as the sun descended, and
 The moon uprose across the sky,
 We were alone, the flea and I,
 And so I took it by the hand

And whispered, 'On your parapet
 10 D'you think that there'd be room for me?'
 'I cannot say,' replied the flea.
 'I'm studying the Alphabet.'

But that was long ago, and saints
 Have died since them - and Ogres bled.
 15 And purple tigers flopped down dead
 Among the pictures and the paints.

TINTINNABULUM

There was a man came up to me,
 He said, 'I know you well,
 Within your face I'm sure I see
 4 The tinkling of a bell.'

I said to him. 'I rather doubt
 We've ever met before!
 I cannot recollect your snout,
 8 Retire, and say no more.'

But he continued, 'I recall
 Our meeting long ago,
 Your face amazed me then with all
 12 Its tinkles, don't you know.'

He put his ear within a good
 Four inches of the space
 On which my features sit and brood
 16 And listened to my face.

'Just so,' he said at last, 'just so.
 Sit down, O tinkly one.
 Here in the cool our thoughts can flow
 20 To where they first began.'

I said, 'I know you not: nor where
 You live: nor who you be
 And much resent the way you stare
 24 Exclusively at me.'

'It is the tinkling, sir,' he said,
 'Your face is pastoral
 Behind its monstrousness are spread
 28 The pastures lush and cool.

'Behind the hot, ridiculous
 Red face of you, there ring
 The bells of youth, melodious
 32 As sheepfolds in a spring.

'I'm sure I'm not mistaken, sir,
 My ears could not forget
 With such interior
 36 Melodies, dry or wet.

'I must have met you long ago,
 In Maida Vale I think,
 When the canal was bright with snow
 40 And black with Indian ink.

'Beneath an archway, on a stair
 (The harvest moon was full -
 One edge of it was trimmed with hair,
 44 The other edge with wool)

'I saw your shape descend on me -
 It all comes gaily back
 You stood and tried to bend on me
 48 Your eyes of button-black.

'Away, away, I heard you say
 (Just as you have tonight -
 Heaven knows I wasn't in your way
 52 Or showing too much light).

'Away! Away! I heard you say
 But swiftly I replied
 I've every kind of right to stay
 56 The law is on my side.

'No MORAL right, no MORAL right,
 You screamed in double prose
 You have no case at all tonight
 60 I am the man who knows.

'And then - you TINKLED. 'Twas that sound
 That cantered through my ears
 And thence into a vale of sound
 64 Too deep for human tears.'

'No, no, no, no, it is not so!
 Your memory's at fault!
 How can such recollections grow
 68 On boughs of biblic salt.

'It was not me, for I am not
 The tinkling type, I said,
 I am a businessman, I've got
 72 A bowler on my head.'

'Mere counterfeit!' the man replied,
 'That symbol of the grave
 Could never even hope to hide
 76 That YOU are not a slave.

'There is a sparkle in your eye,
 A lightness in your tread
 And your demeanour crisp and spry
 80 Leaves nothing to be said.

'Give up your soul. Deny your pride,
 Confess your guilt, and be
 Unutterably on my side
 84 Before we go to tea.

'Though I'm a stranger, can't you feel
 Our kinship - otherwise
 How could your presence soft as veal
 88 Bring tears into my eyes.

'Turn over a fresh page my friend
 And turn it over fast
 For no one knows how soon may end
 92 The foolscap of your past.

'Come, let me hold you by the raw
 Black elbow of your coat,
 Your courage mounts: O leave the shore
 96 While this is yet a boat.

'I am your boat! I am your crew
 Your rudder or your mast -
 Your friend, I am your limpets too
 100 And your elastoplast.'

How could I fail to be inspired
 So hotly said.
 I found my inner faith was fired,
 104 The blood rushed to my head.

'O stranger, I will tell you all!
 I am the man I was
 So nervous of my inner bell
 108 Especially out of doors.

'But I am he: the tinkly one,
 What I can do, I will.'
 Said he, 'See how the golden sun
 112 Sits on that pea-green hill.

'It is a sign. You have confessed
 Your finer self breaks through,
 Even the flowers your books have pressed
 116 Are ogling in the dew.

'Sit down, sit down,' he said. I squatted
 On the sparkling pasture
 The rain came down and filled my spotted
 120 Shirt with pleasant moisture.

A kind of ecstasy descended
 With the rain on me
 And gradually I unbended
 124 Metaphysically.

Sweet genesis! My tingling thumbs
 Describing wide arcs so bright
 They might have been those starry crumbs
 128 That thread the arctic night.

And by exorbitant degrees
 My body grew involved
 Until the problem of my knees
 132 And elbows were resolved

Until my brain grew clearer far
 Than it had ever been
 That both my ears now kept ajar
 136 Might hear what I had seen.

If it be so, that quite unknown
 To friends, I tinkle, stranger
 Please tell me, am I quite alone
 140 In this - and is there danger?

He listened once again, his ear
 Close to my face, and cried,
 'There is no danger - yet I hear
 144 Such silvery sounds inside

'Such sounds as fairies pluck from shrimps
 Of starbeams in the dew,
 O Lord it is a moving thing
 148 To listen sir to you.'

His ear was very near my face,
 I bit it once for fun
 He said, 'You ought to know your place
 152 With friendship newly born.'

'I trusted you,' I said, 'to know
 The friendly way I meant it.'
 'Ah well,' he said, 'I'll get to know
 156 Your ways, and won't resent it.'

He listened once again. I kept
 immobile. An improvement
 so great, he said my tinkling leapt
 160 Straight through the second movement

Such dulcet sounds as might inspire
 A broker with the thrill
 Of consummating his desire
 164 To hug a daffodil.

Again I spoke, 'O tell me, am
 I quite alone in this
 Weird tintinnabulation, Sam,
 168 Is it indigenous?'

I called him Sam because I felt
 Our friendship, strange and quick,
 Needed cementing. Would he melt?
 172 And call me Roderick?

He did - there was no doubt a svelte
 And psychic power possessed us,
 For neither name was one which spelt
 176 The proof of our asbestos.

'Am I alone,' I once again
 Reverted to my theme,
 'Do other tinklers wake the strain
 180 Of cowbells in the cream?'

'There are three others who have this
 Peculiar trait. They are
 A grocer bred in Pontefrice
 184 A bison and a tsar.

'You are the fourth and I will prove
 Your excellence to all.
 Cast off that symbol of the grave
 188 Your bowler and your pall.'

His arguments had been so fair
 And what is more I know
 That there was really something there
 192 That needed seeing to.

So, standing in the lashing rain
 I wrenched my hat away
 From my haematic head, in pain,
 196 And then symbolically.

His eyes were on me all the while
 I flung the symbol through
 The downpour with the kind of smile
 200 That needs attending to.

And I was free! And now my goal
 Is on a different plane
 And I will never let my soul
 204 Be rude to me again.

I CANNOT GIVE THE REASONS

I cannot give the reasons,
I only sing the tunes:
the sadness of the seasons
4 the madness of the moons.

I cannot be didactic
or lucid, but I can
be quite obscure and practic-
8 ally marzipan

In gorgery and gushness
and all that's squishified.
My voice has all the lushness
12 of what I can't abide

And yet it has a beauty
most proud and terrible
denied to those whose duty
16 is to be cerebral.

Among the antlered mountains
I make my viscous way
and watch the sepia fountains
20 throw up their lime-green spray.

THE THREADS REMAIN

The threads remain, and cotton ones
Last longer than a thought
Which takes so long before it's sold
4 And dies before it's bought.

I must begin to classify
My loves, because of my
Disorganized desire to live
8 Before it's time to die.

First there's the love I bear my friends
(A poor and sickly thing),
And then my love for all that long
12 Wild family of string.

Such as the brothers cord and twine,
And Uncle Rope, who's bred
With cotton on the brain, and all
16 My love is based on thread.

Then there is the love I store
And lavish on myself
A healthy and a freckled beast
20 (I keep it on a shelf).

So now I know myself and I
Can start my life anew,
Half magical, half tragical
24 And half an hour, or two.

LEAN SIDEWAYS ON THE WIND

Lean sideways on the wind, and if it bears
Your weight, you are a daughter of the Dawn -
If not, pick up your carcass, dry your tears,
Brush down your dress - for that sweet elfin horn

- 5 You thought you heard was from no fairyland -
Rather it flooded through the kitchen floor,
From where your Uncle Eustace and his band
Of flautists turn my cellar, more and more

Into a place of hollow and decay:
That is my theory, darling, anyway.

'COME, BREAK THE NEWS TO ME, SWEET HORSE'

'Come, break the news to me, Sweet Horse,
Do you not think it best?
Or if you'd rather not - of course
4 We'll let the matter rest.'

The biggest horse that ever wore
His waistcoat inside-out,
Replied: 'As I have sneezed before,
8 There's not a shade of doubt.'

'I find your answer rare, Sweet Horse,
Though hardly crystal-clear,
But tell me true, what kind of course
12 Do you propose to steer?'

The biggest horse that ever wore
His waistcoat outside-in,
Rolled over on the parquet floor
16 And kicked me on the chin.

'O this is lovable,' I cried,
'And rather touching too,
Although I generally prefer
20 A lick of fish-bone glue.'

The only horse who ever kissed
Me smack athwart the chin
Curled up and died. He will be missed
24 By all who cherished him.

SHRINK, SHRINK

'Shrink! Shrink!' said I
'But why?' she cried
'Do as I bid you'
4 I replied

And as she once
had promised she
would both obey and honour me

8 Just me, most just
and holy me
she shrank a bit
for me to see

12 'More! More!' I said
'That's not enough
I want you wrinkled up
like duff

16 'For I am tired
of your smooth skin
I want you wrinkled up
like sin'

20 She then complied
and when I saw
her chin was tapping
on the floor

24 I said 'Enough!
Now you can go
to your mamma
and tell her so.'

AUNTS AND UNCLES

When Aunty Jane
 Became a Crane
 She put one leg behind her head;
 And even when the clock struck ten
 5 Refused to go to bed.

When Aunty Grace
 Became a Plaice
 She all but vanished sideways on;
 Except her nose
 10 And pointed toes
 The rest of her was gone.

When Uncle Wog
 Became a Dog
 He hid himself for shame;
 15 He sometimes hid his bone as well
 And wouldn't hear the front-door bell,
 Or answer to his name.

When Aunty Flo
 Became a Crow
 20 She had a bed put in a tree;
 And there she lay
 And read all day
 Of ornithology.

When Aunty Vi
 25 Became a Fly
 Her favourite nephew
 Sought her life;
 How could he know
 That with each blow
 30 He bruised his Uncle's wife?

When Uncle Sam
 Became a Ham
 We did not care to carve him up;
 He struggled so;
 35 We let him go
 And gave him to the pup.

When Aunty Nag
 Became a Crag
 She stared across the dawn,
 40 To where her spouse
 Kept open house
 With ladies on the lawn.

When Aunty Mig
Became a Pig
45 She floated on the briny breeze,
With irritation in her heart
And warts upon her knees.

When Aunty Jill
Became a Pill
50 She stared all day through dark-blue glass;
And always sneered
When men appeared
To ask her how she was.

When Uncle Jake
55 Became a Snake
He never found it out;
And so as no one mentions it
One sees him still about.

S A T A N

Sickened by virtue he rebelled and cried
For all things horrible to be his bride

For through the hot red tides of sin move such
Fish as lose radiance at virtue's touch.

Should he reform and vomit up his evil?
It would not only be that his spiked devil
Would be dethroned, but also, amid groans
Those swarming hues that make his joints their homes.

LONDON 1941

Half masonry, half pain; her head
 From which the plaster breaks away
 Like flesh from the rough bone, is turned
 Upon a neck of stones; her eyes
 5 Are lid-less windows of smashed glass,
 Each star-shaped pupil
 Giving upon a vault so vast
 How can the head contain it?

The raw smoke
 10 Is inter-wreathing through the jaggedness
 Of her sky-broken panes, and mirror'd
 Fires dance like madmen on the splinters.

All else is stillness save the dancing splinters
 And the slow inter-wreathing of the smoke.

15 Her breasts are crumbling brick where the black ivy
 Had clung like a fantastic child for succour
 And now hangs draggled with long peels of paper,
 Fire-crisp, fire-faded awnings of limp paper
 Repeating still their ghosted leaf and lily.

20 Grass for her cold skin's hair, the grass of cities
 Wilted and swaying on her plaster brow
 From winds that stream along the streets of cities:

Across a world of sudden fear and firelight
 She towers erect, the great stones at her throat,
 25 Her rusted ribs like railings round her heart;
 A figure of dry wounds - of winter wounds -
 O mother of wounds; half masonry, half plain.

M A Y 1 9 4 0

April gone by; the next faint fable-month
 Is on us, ungraspable, an echo
 Of other maytimes when ~~the~~ thought was single
 And the green hesitation of the leaf
 5 Was prophecy for richness with no hint
 Of darkened hours, and of being parted.

If not within the slow limbs of that oak tree,
 If not within the uplands or the furrow,
 Where has lost sanity a resting place
 10 These days. For she has left these habitations
 Built in God's image.

Be proud, slow trees. Be glad you stones and birds,
 And you brown Arun river and all things
 That grow in silence through the hours of maytime -
 15 Be glad you are not fashioned in God's image.

FORT DARLAND

Are there still men who move with silent feet?
And droop their thoughtful heads to earth, their hands
Listless along their sides? And are there lands
4 Where men are quiet in the way they meet?

The limbs my mother bore me know the wrench
That shapes them to the square machine of war.
My feet smash gravel and my hands abhor
8 The butt-plate of the rifle that I clench.

If my head droops or my hands are not forced
Into my sides at the exact parade
Upon the asphalt square where men are made,
12 I am insulting England and am cursed.

As I stand motionless today and study
The red neck of the khaki man I cover
I shall not move but shall defy my body
16 By dreaming of pale gods that laze in ether.

THE SPADESMEN

There is no lack of light and singing limbs
Of throats and ribs and all the naked gear
That holds the quick breath in; there is no fear
4 That these will fail them and dissolve like dreams,

Now that each grave is scooped, each cross is varnished;
The robes of purple from the factory
Hang from the branches of gethsemane -
8 The coffins gleam and all the brass is burnished.

They have supplied the judas and the flails:
The ten-a-minute barbed-wire crown-of-thorns
Are in construction and a million pawns
12 Are ear-marked for the fever and the nails.

They have prepared the swabs of vinegar,
Long tears for cheer-bones and a load of lime.
The spademen have been working overtime
16 To raise so high a mound of golgotha.

THUNDER THE CHRIST OF IT

Thunder the Christ of it. The field is free:
 To everyone his choice: that martial fellow,
 His mouth cram full of nails squats in a tree:
 Gallop you traitors in. Judas in yellow:

While bibles burn, Leviticus and all,
 Christ is forgotten in a world of wit:
 Soak up the planets in a swab of gall,
 This is the day and we must pay for it.

VICTIMS

They had no quiet and smoothed sheets of death
 To fold them and no pillows whiter than the wings
 Of childhood's angels.
 There was no hush of love. No silence flowered
 About them, and no bland, enormous petals
 6 Opened with stillness. Where was lavender
 Or gentle light? Where were the coverlets
 Of quiet? Or white hands to hold their bleeding
 Claws that grabbed horribly for child or lover?
 In twisting flames their twisting bodies blackened,
 For History, that witless chronicler
 Continued writing his long manuscript.

THE CONSUMPTIVE. BELSEN 1945

If seeing her an hour before her last
 Weak cough into all blackness I could yet
 Be held by chalk-white walls, and by the great
 Ash-coloured bed,
 5 And the pillows hardly creased
 By the tapping of her little cough-jerked head -
 If such can be a painter's ecstasy,
 (her limbs like pipes, her head a china skull)
 Then where is mercy?
 10 And what
 Is this my traffic? for my schooled eyes see
 The ghost of a great painting, line and hue,
 In this doomed girl of tallow?
 O Jesus! has this world so white a yellow
 15 As lifts her head by but a breath from linen
 In the congested yet empty world
 Of plaster, cotton, and a little marl?
 Than pallor what is there more terrible?
 There lay the gall
 20 Of that dead mouth of the world.
 And at death's centre a torn garden trembled
 In which her eyes like great hearts of black water
 Shone in their wells of bone,
 Brimmed to the well-heads of the coughing girl,
 25 Pleading through history in that white garden;
 And very wild, upon the small head's cheekbones,
 As on high ridges in an icy dew,
 Burned the sharp roses.

Her agony slides through me: am I glass
30 That grief can find no grip
Save for a moment when the quivering lip
And the coughing weaker than the broken wing
That, fluttering, shakes the life from a small bird
Caught me as in a nightmare? Nightmares pass;
35 The image blurs and the quick razor-edge
Of anger dulls, and pity dulls. O God,
That grief so glibly slides! The little badge
On either cheek was gathered from her blood:
Those coughs were her last words. They had no weight
40 Save that through them was made articulate
Earth's desolation on the alien bed.
Though I be glass, it shall not be betrayed,
That last weak cough of her small, trembling head.

IS THERE NO LOVE CAN LINK US?

Is there no thread to bind us - I and he
 Who is dying now, this instant as I write
 And may be cold before this line's complete?

And is there no power to link us - I and she
 Across whose body the loud roof is falling?

6 Or the child, whose blackening skin
 Blossoms with hideous roses in the smoke?

Is there no love can link us - I and they?
 Only this hectic moment? This fierce instant
 Striking now
 Its universal, its uneven blow?

There is no other link. Only this sliding
 Second we share: this desperate edge of now.

THE TIME HAS COME FOR MORE THAN SMALL DECISIONS

The time has come for more than small decisions.
 I have my battleground no less than nations:
 I have great traitors in the populous clay:
 I am, no less than Albion, at war -
 5 For while she struggles I must force my way
 Into a land where sharper outlines are.

Before man's bravery I bow my head;
 More so when valour is unnatural
 And fear, a bat between the shoulder-blades
 10 Flaps its cold webs - but I am ill at ease
 With propaganda glory, and the lies
 Of statesmen and the lords of slippery trades.

O let me find a way of thought that cuts
 An angry line dividing this from that
 15 And scours the soft winds that have no court.

May 1941

AS A GREAT TOWN DRAWS THE ECCENTRICS IN

As a great town draws the eccentrics in,
So I am like a city built of clay
Where madmen flourish, for beneath my skin,
In every secret arch or alleyway

That winds about my bones of midnight, they
Lurk in their rags, impatient for the call
To muster at my breastbone, and to cry
For revolution through the capital.

AT TIMES OF HALF-LIGHT

It is at times of half-light that I find
Forsaken monsters shouldering through my mind.
If the earth were lamplit I should always be
Found in their company.

Even in sunlight I have heard them clamouring
About the gateways of my brain, with glimmering
Rags about their bruise-dark bodies bound,
And in each brow a ruby like a wound.

NO DIFFERENCE

There is no difference between night and day
 For time is darkness now, halted and null.
 The roads of noon lead their abstracted way,
 The streets of midnight wander through the Skull.

Darkness and time have fused and formed a circle
 Around the little gestures of the clay
 And there's no movement but the gusty cycle
 Of calendars that tear dark leaves away.

HEADS FLOAT ABOUT ME

Heads float about me; come and go, absorb me;
 Terrify me that they deny the nightmare
 That they should be, defy me;
 And all the secrecy; the horror
 5 Of truth, of this intrinsic truth
 Drifting, ah God, along the corridors
 Of the world; hearing the metal
 Clang; and the rolling wheels.
 Heads float about me haunted
 By solitary sorrows.

COARSE AS THE SUN IS BLATANT

Coarse as the sun is blatant, the high spinach -
 Coloured elms, the lawns a yellow matting
 Of tired grass, disgust me and the netting
 Of summer boughs that creak at every touch.

- 5 Of this hot breeze distract me; live apart,
 And bring no love to me from other lands,
 From other countries, other fields: my hands
 Are empty as my blind lop-sided heart!

- Lop-sided, for self pity like a curse
 10 Turns all I see to ugliness: the lawns
 A wilderness for lack of unicorns fades
 The elm a tower for birds of paradise.

Nature! I hate you for you scorch my brain
 And make me see my weakness yet again.

EL GRECO

- They spire terrific bodies into heaven,
 Tall saints enswathed in a tempestuous flare
 Of frozen draperies that twist through air,
 Of dye incredible, from rapture thieven,
 5 And heads set steeply skyward brittle carven
 Pale upon coiling cloud in regions rare.
 Their beauty, ice-like, shrills, and everywhere
 A metal music sounds, cold spirit grieved.

- So drives the acid nail of coloured pain
 10 Into our vulnerable wood earth-rooted,
 And sends the red sap racing through the trees
 Where slugged it lay - now spun with visions looted
 From whining skies, and sharp Gethsmanés
 Of hollow light and all the wounds of Spain.

AN UGLY CROW SITS HUNCHED ON JACKSON'S HEART

An ugly crow sits hunched on Jackson's heart
 And when it spreads its wings like broken fans
 The body of his gloom is torn apart

Revealing sea-green pastures and gold towns
 5 And tents and children climbing to the sun
 And all the white and crimson of the clowns.

But Jackson knows no secret way to turn
 His tongue into crow-language, nor to plead
 His right to pastures, tumblers, and gold towns;

10 The sullen fowl is witless that it broods
 Upon a human heart, and that its wings
 When spread disclose his childhood in a flood

Of spectral gold, where fleeting vistas float
 Their dappled meads and vales through Jackson's heart.

POEM

Out of the overlapping
 Leaves of my brain came tapping
 Tapping . . . a voice that is not mine alone:
 4 Nor can the woodpecker
 Claim it as his own: the flicker
 Deep in the foliage belongs to neither
 Birds, men or dreams.

It is as far away as childhood seems.